

OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



A TRIBUTE TO TEAM17

FOUNDER ANDREAS TADIC ON
THE PUBLISHER'S AMIGA HITS

ULTIMATE GUIDE: RESIDENT EVIL 2

CAPCOM'S MONSTROUSLY GOOD
SEQUEL UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

20 YEARS OF

NINTENDO DS

HOW NINTENDO'S BRAND OF INNOVATION DELIVERED
THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR HANDHELD CONSOLE

PLAYSTATION CURIOS

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PROVING
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HOMEBREW
OXENFREE



MAGAZINE CRAFT: PAUL DAVIES

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FAN WHO REVITALISED
CVG IN THE NINETIES

ULTIMATE GUIDE: PROJECT RUB

THE CRAZY MINIGAMES
THAT DEFINED SEGA'S
DS LAUNCH TITLE



LOAD 267

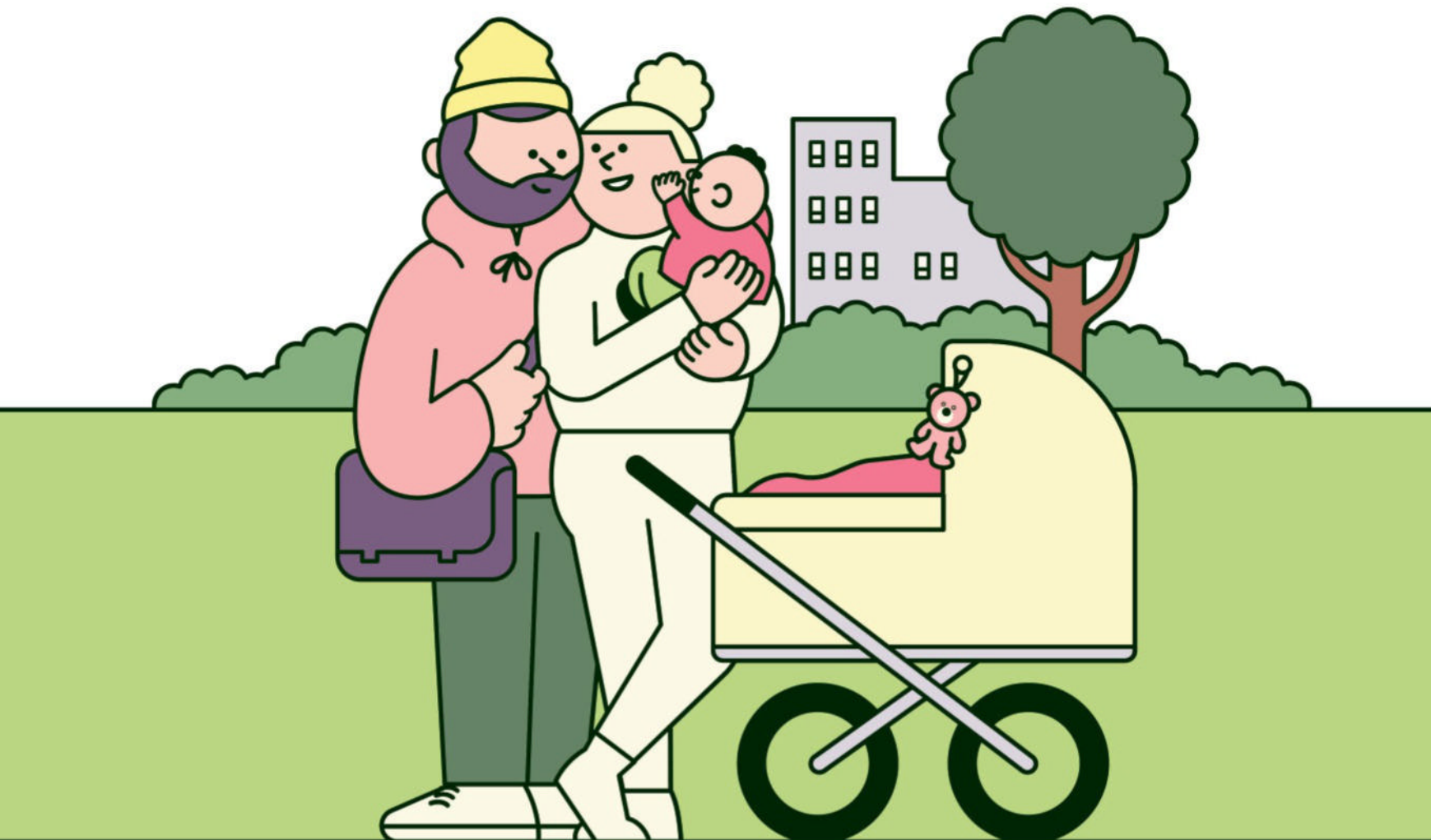
THE MAKING OF CADAVER

BEHIND THE SCENES
OF THE CLASSIC AMIGA
DUNGEON CRAWLER

JACKIE CHAN STUNTMASTER

HOW THE ICONIC ACTION
STAR ENDED UP ON
SONY'S PLAYSTATION

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR
FAVOURITE DS GAME?**DARRAN JONES**

Tetris DS is my pick. It's filled with nostalgia but also offers some amazing game modes to master.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing:

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow

Favourite game of all time:

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast

**TIM EMPEY**

I really enjoyed *WarioWare: Touched!* and also messing about on *Electroplankton...* until it got nicked that is.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go

Currently playing:

Aliens: Dark Descent

Favourite game of all time:

God Hand

**NICK THORPE**

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney gripped me from start to finish, so much so that I imported the sequels rather than waiting for the UK release dates.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing: *Pokémon Trading Card Game*

Favourite game of all time:

Sonic The Hedgehog

**ANDY SALTER**

I've never played any games on the DS, although I did buy a former housemate a DS Lite as a Christmas present.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently modding:

RTR: Imperium Surrectum

Favourite game of all time:

Rome: Total War although I guess it's the Remastered edition now

**RORY MILNE**

Better DS racers followed, but *Ridge Racer DS* was one of the system's first and the first *Ridge Racer* title you could play on the go.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing: *WipEout*

Favourite game of all time:

Tempest

**STUART HUNT**

Contra 4. It's one of the best, and toughest, games in the series. A true portable gem.

Expertise: Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:

Block Blast!

Favourite game of all time:

Tomb Raider

**MARTYN CARROLL**

My original DS was criminally underused, but I loved playing the homebrew release *Manic Miner: The Lost Levels*. Dig it out, it's an absolute delight.

Expertise: Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:

Mario Vs Donkey Kong

Favourite game of all time:

Jet Set Willy

**ANDREW FISHER**

Soul Bubbles – a hidden gem, based on the classic Infogrames title *Bubble Ghost*.

Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch

Currently playing:

Xeno Brigade: Extinction

Favourite game of all time:

Wizball

**PAUL ROSE**

My favourite DS game is easily *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars*

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing: *Astro Bot*

Favourite game of all time:

Half-Life 2



Anyone who knows me will know I'm not one for hyperbole.

Anyone that really knows me will know that's a complete lie.

So here goes – Nintendo's DS was a truly revolutionary console.

Regardless of whether you thought the likes of *Nintendogs* or *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* were proper games (they were) or whether the DS' stylus was nothing more than a gimmick (it wasn't) it's impossible to deny the tremendous impact that Nintendo's 'third pillar' had on the industry.

Nintendo's DS didn't just introduce exciting new ways to play games, it also built the foundations that would allow Nintendo to further penetrate the non-gaming market with the Wii. Helped by those innovative controls, inventive game designs and non-traditional gaming adverts, the DS left a crater-sized hole on the gaming landscape and it remains the best-selling handheld of all time. It makes sense then to not only give it a dedicated cover, but to look at why it was such a remarkable system.

Outside of our 20-year DS retrospective, we examine the creation of *Cadaver*, and *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster*, celebrate the Amiga games of Team17 and return to Raccoon City for an Ultimate Guide on *Resident Evil 2*. We also revisit *Project Rub*, highlight a selection of quirky PlayStation titles and review the latest collection from Digital Eclipse.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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Darran absolutely abhors hunting in the real world, but for some reason he gets an absurd kick out of playing the *Cabela's* games. He truly is a rather odd fellow

©Damien McFerran



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20 Years Of The DS

Veteran programmers and journalists look back at the impact that Nintendo's innovative handheld had on the industry



Ultimate Guide: Resident Evil 2

The bosses, modes and conversions that defined Capcom's killer sequel

Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates



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A Tribute To: Team17

Our latest guide focusses on the Amiga bangers that launched the popular publisher



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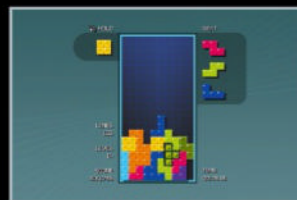
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Only one of these options will make the cover, but which will it be?

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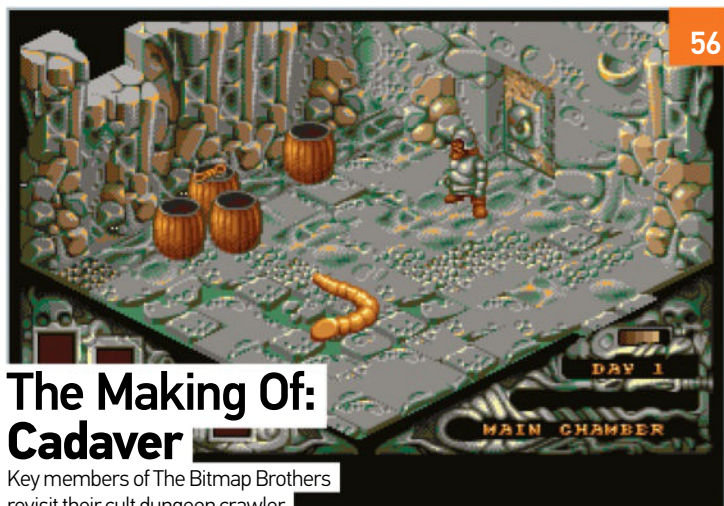
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The Making Of: Cadaver

Key members of The Bitmap Brothers revisit their cult dungeon crawler





PRESERVING THE PAST

GOG's Marcin Paczynski discusses the publisher's new preservation project

» [PC] Marcin tells us that the early *STALKER* games were particularly hard to add to the service.

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Marcin Paczynski on GOG's ambitious plans to preserve the future of PC gaming

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Paul makes a case for a brand-new game that will cause your nostalgia glands to tingle

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Chris Beach chats to us about ModRetro's Chromatic, its tribute to the Game Boy Color

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

Nick bravely crosses the timeline so that he can report on gaming's past for you. Isn't he nice?

» [PC] Newer remasters like *Blade Runner Enhanced Edition* have also been targeted by GOG for inclusion in its program.

As great as PC gaming is, playing older games can sometimes feel like a bit of a chore. GOG

has been dedicated to making older games not only accessible for modern gamers to buy and enjoy, but also to try to make them as easy to use as possible and that's where its new initiative the GOG Preservation Program comes into play. "This is our next step in game preservation, made possible by over a decade of experience in the field – whether technological, legal, or business-related," explains Marcin Paczynski, GOG's senior business development manager.

Marcin tells us that GOG has over 2,000 classic titles in its catalogue and that while other publishers maintain their own libraries, they're rarely as extensive and often focus on newer titles, especially since

compatibility issues with DirectX 9 can affect many games from the mid-Noughties to early 2010s. "What makes it even more challenging for us is that our work to maintain game compatibility often has to be done without access to the original source code," he continues.

GOG prides itself on the classic games it makes available to fans, which is why we're so interested in the company's next steps. "With time and experience, we realised we could do more," Marcin says, "for us, game preservation doesn't just mean making a game available – it means making it playable. With the GOG Preservation Program, we commit to take care of those games when no one else does; when publishers and developers no longer maintain it, this is when we step in, keep checking, keep updating, listen to the community and actively act on it."



» Marcin Paczynski hopes to have all eligible games added to the GOG Preservation Program by 2030. "While the exact number depends on various factors, our proven track record and long-term commitment give us confidence that we can achieve this vision."

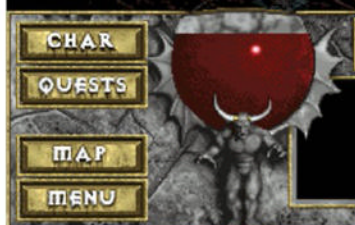
The new initiative has launched with 100 games and Marcin has been delighted with the response so far. "Thank you for all your comments and emails – it truly reinforces our belief that what we're doing matters." It's worth noting that GOG's new plans aren't just about making games easily accessible, it's also about doing everything it can to enhance the play experience, whether it's by adding support for higher resolutions,

offering a smoother performance, adding extra language options and even including DLC. "For *Heroes Of Might And Magic 3: Complete*, we fixed non-standard resolutions, and for *Dungeon Keeper 2*, we improved overall stability and fixed an issue when at a later game level, some creatures would not spawn for the player to recruit," Marcin explains. "These kinds of updates make sure you get the best version of these games, hassle-free."





» [PC] With games like *Diablo*, Marcin promises that, "You can be quite certain that when you launch it again in five years it will still work as it should on your brand-new Windows 12+ PC."



Marcin tells us that it took over three months to prepare the first 100 games, but that a game's age and complexity can add to the timeframe as they need additional updates and adjustments to be fully compatible. Interestingly, only 30% of the titles GOG looked at within its library met the publisher's quality criteria, especially as some have only had a few updates since launch. "It's not that they did not launch," Marcin clarifies, "they just didn't work as well as they should. For example: the alt-tab did not work (*Arcanum: Of Steamworks And Magick Obscura*), the DOSBox configuration file was outdated and not tuned to modern CPUs causing weird animations



» [PC] Other publishers have been receptive to the new initiative with Marcin telling us, "We've only heard praise from our partners, with some asking to add their games to the program."



» Marcin plans to have "500 games in the GOG Preservation Program by the end of 2025".

“For us, game preservation doesn't just mean making a game available – it means making it playable”

MARCIN PACZYNSKI

(*Dungeon Keeper Gold*), or the sound was sometimes de-syncing in cutscenes (*Beyond Good & Evil*, that will be added to the program soon)."

So how do you even choose games to launch a service like this? "We picked the first 100 games for the program by focusing on their historical importance, fan demand,



» [PC] You won't pay extra if you already own one of the included games. "All updates are free and will continue to be free," Marcin says.

and the unique challenges of keeping them playable," Marcin says. "The goal was to bring together a mix of fan-favourite classics and influential titles that deserve to be enjoyed by both longtime fans and new players."

Three of those influential titles Marcin mentions are Capcom's *Resident Evil* games, which have been absent from PCs for an age. "We are very grateful to Capcom for giving us a chance to prove ourselves by allowing us to create Windows 11-compatible versions of those technically challenging games and make them available on GOG. We are now working hard to bring more titles from this region."

Marcin was keen to point out that the new initiative isn't just for retro titles, but is "about making sure any game that's no longer supported by its original creators stays playable. With over 16 years of experience in preserving games, we're extremely excited to keep growing the program and protecting gaming history." ✨

A CRASH SMASH

Kenilworth's Holiday Inn recently hosted Fusion Retro Book's Crash Live 2024. The event was a huge success with a number of guest speakers including Sandy White, David Jones and Raffaele Cecco, while a number of RG freelancers, including Graeme Mason and Faith Johnson were helping out as well. Once again organised by Chris Wilkins, it proved to be very popular with the guests that attended and looked like a great way for Spectrum fans to end the year.



©Paul Davies

MAGIC KNIGHT RETURNS

David Jones has certainly been busy. In addition to attending Crash Live 2024, he's also revealed that he's working on a brand-new game in his beloved *Magic Knight* series. Known as *MK5*, the adventure is currently planned for a 2025 release and, according to David, will most likely appear on Steam. We can't think of a better way of celebrating the franchise's incoming 40th anniversary than with a new game.



Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine



Mister MiSTer



My retro gaming has gone nuclear. I've got so many modded systems that I struggle to be bothered to play. My N64,

GameCube, Dreamcast and now an Xbox 360 – all sitting under my desk gathering dust and resentments (aside from *The Typing Of The Dead*, one of the more bonkers Japanese titles on the DC). However, I have dived headfirst back into the hobby with the giddiness of a teenager after his first drink.

I've had my eye on the MiSTer FPGA system for quite a while. I won't try and describe it because I don't really know what it is and I'll get it wrong and you'll be sat there smugly laughing at me over your Hob Nobs. I will not give you that satisfaction. What I do know is it recreates loads of systems up to and including the Saturn and N64. The thing that has always excited me about it is its ability to act like old micros. Stuff like the BBC, Dragon, Oric – you know my fetishes. I am a man of very simple tastes.

What put me off was the cost. I could not justify a minimum of £450 on something that yet again I was almost definitely not going to use. That's a lot of dough and I'll be honest, I'm a little skinty winty woo. But then I heard talk of some dude called Taki Udon who was working on a much cheaper clone of the system. To cut a long story short (too late for that) a couple of months ago I stayed up until 2am to order one of his MiSTer Pi units (it's not a Pi, that's a silly name) for about £140 all in.

It arrived. This trio of PCB boards that you had to fit together like some 3D jigsaw. I managed to assemble it and nothing broke! Unusual for me. I booted it up and installed all the software. Blimey, that worked as well. Do you know what's even more surprising? I've been using it. I've played more old games in the last two months than in the previous two years. Such joy being able to flick a switch, scroll through a menu and suddenly I have *Alcatraz 2* on the Dragon 32 making that awful noise on my screen.

I was worried I would feel overwhelmed by the choice available but that hasn't been the case. In fact it's allowed me to try out stuff I'd never played before. The Amiga had completely passed me by. I think someone lent me one for a weekend but he only gave me *Altered Beast* and I thought it was rubbish and so I dismissed the whole machine. Thirty-five years later I can make amends to that computer and acknowledge I was wrong – it's an incredible thing to play games on. I've also been digging into the Saturn and N64 and loving every second of it.

I'll no doubt be updating you on more of my adventures – and if you have any suggestions for games and systems I may have missed, let me know! ✨

“I was worried I would feel overwhelmed by the choice available but that hasn't been the case”

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Nostalgia done right



Nostalgia is a powerful thing. You know that better than most, because you're literally holding nostalgia in your hands as you read this, flooding your brain with that sweet, sweet dopamine and serotonin. Retro gaming is all about continuity with yourself, connecting who you were with who you are now. As uncertain as the world can be these days, we all benefit from indulging in something feel-good and familiar from happier, less uncertain, times. So it may seem strange that I'm now going to talk about a brand-new videogame...

But wait! Stop screaming! Don't throw this magazine across the room! Especially don't do that if you're reading it on your phone. Because this is a game that's going to give you the biggest dopamine hit you could imagine, without any kind of underlying shame that you're living in the past.

The game is *Astro Bot* for the PS5, and it's the kind of game they make so rarely these days. I'll be honest: much of what passes for modern AAA gaming doesn't do a lot for me. I don't love the aesthetics, everything seems to take itself too seriously, or is trying too hard to be a movie. We've either got ultra-violent hyper-realism on one hand, or weird hyper-stylised migraine simulators on the other.

What I consider to be the Golden Age of gaming – the mid-Nineties – the 3D platformer ruled supreme, but hardly anyone outside of Nintendo ever bothers with the genre anymore.

This makes *Astro Bot* an outlier, but also – for many of us – comfortingly familiar. It reminds me of the sheer ingenuity of *Yoshi's Island*; a game which seemed to reinvent itself every level, throwing new gameplay and ideas at the player with startling regularity.

This is what *Astro Bot* does: every level has its own gameplay mechanic. Some of those levels are short – just quick blasts of fun – but you never know what you're going to get. Even when it returns to powers that you'll have seen earlier in the game, it finds new ways to use them.

But *Astro Bot* does something else too: it LITERALLY trades on nostalgia, by taking you through the history of PlayStation games. Throughout you'll be rescuing your Astro Bot buddies, who are hidden around the levels – but some of those buddies resemble characters from classic games; Kratos, Solid Snake, Spyro The Dragon, PaRappa The Rapper, the cast of *Infamous* and *Killzone*, *Oddworld*... some of the references go really deep into the catalogue; heck, even *Patapon* gets a nod, along with *Shadow Of The Colossus*. But it gets better!

Every few levels you'll enter an *Astro Bot* take on a Sony classic – everything from *Ape Escape* to *Horizon Zero Dawn*, from *Uncharted* to *LocoRoco*. It's brilliant. Even outside of the nods to past games, the references to Sony hardware are broad, deep and often hilariously obscure. More than that though, it manages to embrace nostalgia without simply wallowing; by being new, and clever and pushing games forward. It's nostalgia done right. ★



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TAKE TO THE STARS IN THE PLANET HOPPING ADVENTURE-RPG

BEYOND GALAXYLAND

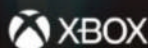
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GameSpew

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» A variety of different colour options are available for the Chromatic hardware from launch.

ModRetro Chromatic

Meet the new handheld aiming to provide the ultimate Game Boy experience

The latest entrant in the retro-gaming market has some interesting pedigree, as ModRetro was founded by Oculus VR founder Palmer Luckey. Its first product is the Chromatic, an FPGA-based recreation of the Game Boy Color that is compatible with not only the console's original software, but a line of new cartridge releases and re-releases from ModRetro. We caught up with ModRetro's head of game development, Chris Beach, to find out more about the project before its imminent arrival.

How did the Chromatic project start off, Chris?

I'm not sure whether you're aware, but ModRetro actually started as an online forum for modders around ten years ago. Our founder is very passionate about the Game Boy and Game Boy Color, so their idea was to give gamers the most authentic experience possible, whilst also offering a device that had premium materials so it was built to last, and just bring that magic back for both the current gaming generation and people that remember the Game Boy and Game Boy Color.

We've seen other Game Boy Color-compatible devices like the Analogue Pocket and the Funnyplaying FPGBC, and there are various mods available for the original hardware. What makes Chromatic different to those options?

Well, we've really dialled in on making it the most authentic experience possible. And that starts with the LCD display, which is a one-to-one recreation of the Game Boy Color screen. It has the exact same resolution, so you'll be experiencing these games exactly how they should be seen, as it comes with pixel-perfect accuracy, and the colour gamut is one-to-one with the original Game Boy Color. And of course, it has the premium materials – we've got the magnesium alloy shell, PBT buttons, and a scratch-proof lens made from sapphire glass. You can also connect the Chromatic to your PC via USB-C out. It will



» Chris Beach, head of game development at ModRetro.

detect it as a webcam, so you can stream your gaming directly to your PC, which will be great for streamers. But you can also connect your PC to your TV, so you can play by your TV without the need for a dock. So I think we're really trying to set ourselves apart by focussing on giving people the best experience when they're playing Game Boy and Game Boy Color games, but also having a device that feels as premium as possible.

A lot of companies that get involved in the retro market either publish games or release hardware, they don't tend to



» Toki Tori will return for the Chromatic, with improvements including faster movement and no timer.

“The Game Boy development community is very active currently”

CHRIS BEACH

do both. Why is ModRetro doing both?

We wanted to give back people the experience of playing original Game Boy and Game Boy Color games. The Game Boy development community is very active currently and there's a lot of great games coming through, so we wanted to support those indie developers and get those new games into people's hands. But our plan is to also help people obtain and purchase games they might not have been able to previously, such as *Project S-11*, which is a pretty rare title – I think the original goes for around £200 pounds, but we're working with the original developer to re-release that so people have a chance of owning it physically. It's similar with *Baby T-Rex*, which is one of the rarest original Game Boy games, which

I think you can pick up for around £1,200, if you can find it.

So it's all about introducing these hidden gems and hard to obtain games to people that remember the Game Boy and the new generation, and supporting the indie devs to get these new titles in front of as many people as possible.

How much difficulty is involved in negotiating the rights to games that were previously released on the Game Boy?

I think the biggest challenge is actually getting hold of the original developers, because they're 20-plus-year-old games. But when we do and I chat to the developers, and they hear about what we're doing, they're really keen to work with us. But yeah, I think the biggest

challenge is actually getting hold of them.

Would you say it's an easier process when actively working with the homebrew development community?

Yes, and the reason for that is because I'm a developer myself. I've been working in the homebrew community for the last five or six years, and I know a lot of the top developers in the space, so I was chatting to them regularly before ModRetro started. Now they know what we're doing, our plans of releasing these games, they're really keen to work with us. But of course, we review every game that we release, and it has to hit a certain standard before we agree to release that game.

A new, officially licensed version of Tetris is bundled

with the Chromatic. How did that come about, and will it be available separately?

Well, our founders actually got in touch with The Tetris Company to explain what we have going on with the Chromatic, and they were really happy to work with us and get a new version of *Tetris* out there. And of course, we wanted to give buyers that nostalgic experience of buying the console with the bundled-in *Tetris*. We may look into a stand-alone release, but that isn't on the cards at the moment.

When and where can readers buy the Chromatic, and how much will it cost?

If you're based in the United Kingdom or Europe, you can buy it through modretro.com for £156. That comes with the bundled-in *Tetris*, and we're expected to ship before Christmas. ★



» [Game Boy Color] *Project S-11* has certainly climbed in price in recent years, so a reissue is welcome.



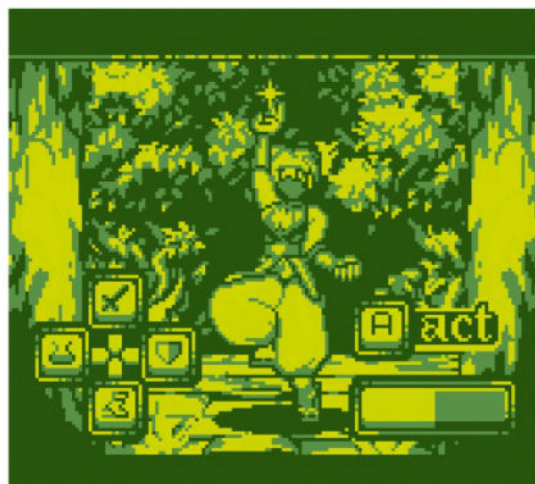
» Both original and modern cartridges are supported, and power is supplied by three AAA batteries.



» [Game Boy Color] Chris himself is developing *Dragonym*, a brand-new RPG to be published by ModRetro.



» The Chromatic looks very similar to the classic Game Boy, but with an appealing striped corner.



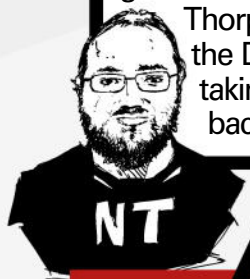
» [Game Boy] Dungeon crawler *Traumatarium: Penitent* is representative of ModRetro's support for non-colour games.



» [Game Boy Color] We had a chance to try the new *Tetris* release, and it's a rather nice version.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JUNE 2008 – It's appropriate that a game about thievery steals everyone's attention as the traditional summer lull kicks in, but there are other games too, we promise. Nick Thorpe has refuelled the DeLorean, and he's taking you for a drive back in time



**NEWS
JUNE 2008**

UEFA Euro 2008 took place this month, with the Republic of Ireland and all four UK home nations having failed to qualify.

The Swiss, co-hosting with Austria, lost the opening match 0-1 to the Czech Republic in Basel on 7 June. Spain and Germany clashed in the final on 29 June in Vienna, with Fernando Torres scoring the only goal to secure Spain's victory and begin a spell of dominance for the team.

Renowned comedian George Carlin passed away at the age of 71 on 22 June. First breaking through in the Sixties, Carlin quickly shed his initial clean cut image and embraced counterculture comedy that earned him renown as one of the greatest stand-up acts of all time. He was also well known for his appearances in films including *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *Dogma* and *Cars*.

Bill Gates stepped down from his day-to-day duties at Microsoft on 27 June after a two year handover process, with Ray Ozzie and Craig Mundie acting as dual successors. With his personal fortune estimated at around \$58 billion, Gates wished to spend more time devoted to charitable work through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, though he remained on the Microsoft board as non-executive chairman.



» [Xbox 360] Games seldom enjoy the kind of universal acclaim that *Grand Theft Auto IV* received.

Steal the truck.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 2008

There was one game monopolising the attention of press and public alike this month, and it was *Grand Theft Auto IV* – the first *GTA* of the HD era.

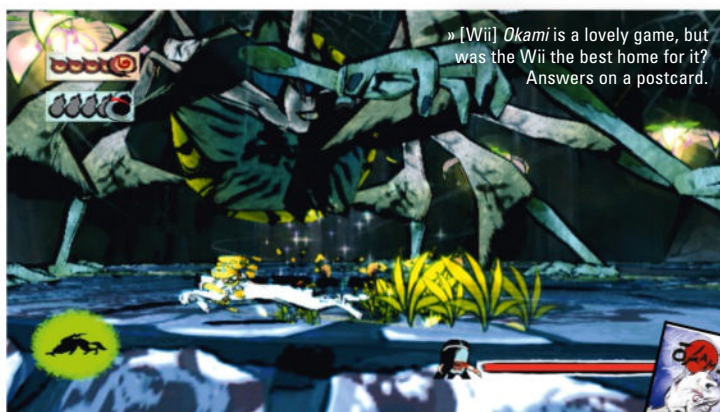
Anticipation was running high for this game, and it didn't disappoint, achieving scores of 10/10 from *Edge*, *games™* and *X360*, 5/5 from *360* and 98% from *Play*. Add those to the 10/10 scores it received in the exclusive reviews carried by *Official PlayStation Magazine* and *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* the previous month,

and you have genuinely universal acclaim. "*Grand Theft Auto IV* is the most prominent landmark on a continuing path to even more vivid worlds, thickly set with drama, humour and story," *games™* enthused, concluding that, "Here and now, in the current state of the art, there is little else you can reasonably expect a game to do." *Edge* felt that the game "isn't without blemishes" but that "they look insignificant in the context of the game's insane scale". It further noted that Rockstar "elects not to rethink some of

the more masochistic elements of its predecessors", but that it was forgivable "because its cast of brilliantly drawn characters lure you into a greater engagement than ever before".

Whether you want to put it down to the usual summer slump or other publishers trying to avoid competing with a mammoth release, there wasn't really anything else to shout about on Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 this month. Thankfully, other platforms had at least a little more going on. Over on the Wii, that was a port of the cult PS2 favourite *Okami*, which scored 95% in *Official Nintendo Magazine* and 8/10 in *nRevolution*. The latter praised it as a "masterpiece of a game" that was "treated shoddily" due to visual issues such as more vivid colours and blurry graphics, as well as "poorly executed" motion controls that hampered combat.

On the DS, *Soul Bubbles* tasked players with transporting spirits by encasing them in bubbles and blowing them around. The game earned 93% from *ONM* and 9/10 from

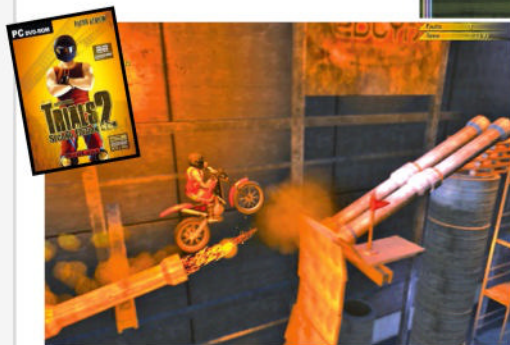


» [Wii] *Okami* is a lovely game, but was the Wii the best home for it? Answers on a postcard.

nRevolution, with the former describing it as a “part puzzler, part action and part exploration game that not only puts your brain into gear but also makes good use of the DS’s capabilities to boot”. Similar sentiments were shared by *nRevolution*, which felt that, “It’s practically a work of art and the atmosphere is enhanced by the mystical theme which seems to draw its influence from a range of sources.”

One game that would undoubtedly draw players to the PSP was *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, an action-RPG prequel to the iconic PlayStation game. *OPM* felt that the “exceptionally pretty” game offered a story that was “charming and enjoyable; laden with melodrama and emotion – regardless of your attachment to the original”. That was good for a score of 8/10. *Edge* wasn’t as positive, offering a 6/10 score and feeling that the battle system was “brilliant at moments and numbingly dull at others”. The magazine further opined that, “The design of the locations and particularly the battle missions all too often strays into the uninspired.”

» [PC] Crash the bike, make the funny man go all floppy. Lather, rinse, repeat.



PSP owners seeking something a bit more abstract and offbeat could instead opt for the perspective-based puzzling of *Echochrome*. “If two platforms appear linked, simply because you twist the view to make them look that way, then they are,” said *Edge*, summarising the game’s rules. *OPM* praised the concept, giving the game 8/10 and saying that “you’re not just buying a compelling puzzler, you’re also getting a lesson in the meaning of perspective, interaction and perception”. *Edge* scored it 7/10, noting that, “The game deliberately prevents you from creating certain routes,” which, “feels like a cheap shot”.

Finally, the *Kikstart*-style action of *Trials 2: Second Edition* gained 80% in *PC Gamer* and 7/10 in *Edge*. *PC Gamer* felt that “any game with a ragdoll to torture will keep people coming back” and that “the occasional moment where everything comes together and you soar like a teen prodigy into the air, this is a game where you’ll aim for failure over success,



» [DS] *Soul Bubbles* is still pretty cheap, if you want to add it to your DS collection.

simply because it’s so damn fun”. *Edge* felt that it was “both utterly maddening and addictive enough for it not to matter” and was “a more engaging experience than its modest gameplay would suggest”.

Join us next month, when another iconic series engages in some four-play. ★



» [PSP] Zack gets a smack, but far worse is to come for the unfortunate chap.

CHARTS

JUNE 2008

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 – **Gran Turismo 5 Prologue** (Sony)
- 2 – **Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas** (Ubisoft)
- 3 – **MotorStorm** (Sony)
- 4 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
- 5 – **Viking: Battle For Asgard** (Sega)



PC

- 1 – **Assassin's Creed** (Ubisoft)
- 2 – **Football Manager 2008** (Sega)
- 3 – **The Sims 2: Freetime** (EA)
- 4 – **Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War – Soulstorm** (THQ)
- 5 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)



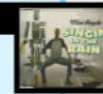
DS

- 1 – **Dr Kawashima's Brain Training** (Nintendo)
- 2 – **Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games** (Sega)
- 3 – **Cooking Mama 2** (505 Games)
- 4 – **Imagine: Babies** (Ubisoft)
- 5 – **More Brain Training From Dr Kawashima** (Nintendo)



MUSIC

- 1 – **Singin' In The Rain** (Mint Royale)
- 2 – **Take A Bow** (Rihanna)
- 3 – **Closer** (Ne-Yo)
- 4 – **That's Not My Name** (The Ting Tings)
- 5 – **Love Song** (Sara Bareilles)



THIS MONTH IN...



Official PlayStation Magazine

One sentence fills us with immense dread. “Welcome to the world of slash fiction.” Oh no. “I can even figure out a way to make one of my male characters pregnant,” says *Darkstalkers* fan fiction author Jessie82. Oh no.



Edge

“A lot of people saw that the *Prince Of Persia* universe could certainly have a home on Wii,” says Ubisoft producer Ben Mattes. “You would never see a port of the game we’re making, however. That’ll never, never happen.”



games™

The new arcade racer from Yu Suzuki’s AM Plus team, *Sega Race TV*, scores 8/10 and is hailed as, “Another example of what Sega does best.” Players disagree – the game flops in arcades and an *R-Tuned* conversion kit is soon rushed out.



"A MUST
FOR ANY
SHOOT-EM-UP
FAN!"

95%



"A FAST-MOVING
COMBINATION OF
DEFENDER AND
JET-PACK!"

93%

• Retro Mode •



AVAILABLE DECEMBER 2024!



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ARCHER MACLEAN'S **DROPZONE**™

· 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION ·

***IN THE VAST COSMOS OF RETRO VIDEO GAMES, CERTAIN
TITLES STAND OUT FOR THEIR INNOVATION,
CHALLENGE, AND ENDURING APPEAL...
ONE SUCH GAME IS DROPZONE!***

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Updated visuals and refined controls while staying true to the original's essence, using Archer's original source code.

Players can seamlessly switch between classic 8-bit and updated visuals in real time, a unique feature for a retro remake!



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Cyclone

COSTA'S CEREBRAL FOLLOW-UP

» RETROREVIVAL



» ZX SPECTRUM » 1984 » VORTEX SOFTWARE

One of my favourite developers from the 8-bit era was Costa Panayi.

His games often reminded me of early Ultimate titles in that they were often very slick looking, very polished and very reminiscent of the arcade

games I used to enjoy.

Cyclone is Costa's follow-up to the excellent *Tornado Low Level* and while it features many similar elements of that earlier game, including impressively smooth scrolling and a distinctive, slightly skewed, slightly overhead perspective, mechanically *Cyclone* is rather different.

Those differences extend far beyond the fact that you're now piloting a helicopter instead of a jet – the aim of *Cyclone* is more about retrieval than simple wanton destruction. That's not to say there's anything bad about flying across a landscape and gunning down bogeys as they fly towards you, but the nuanced and sometimes complicated mechanics of *Cyclone* require quite a bit more thought.

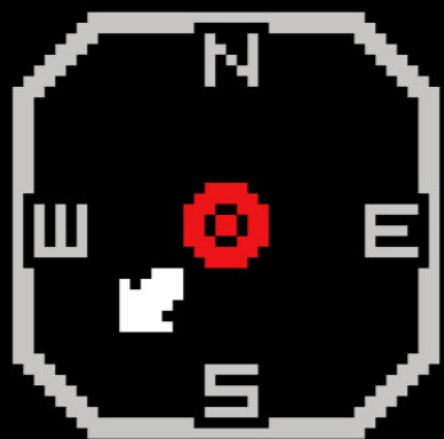
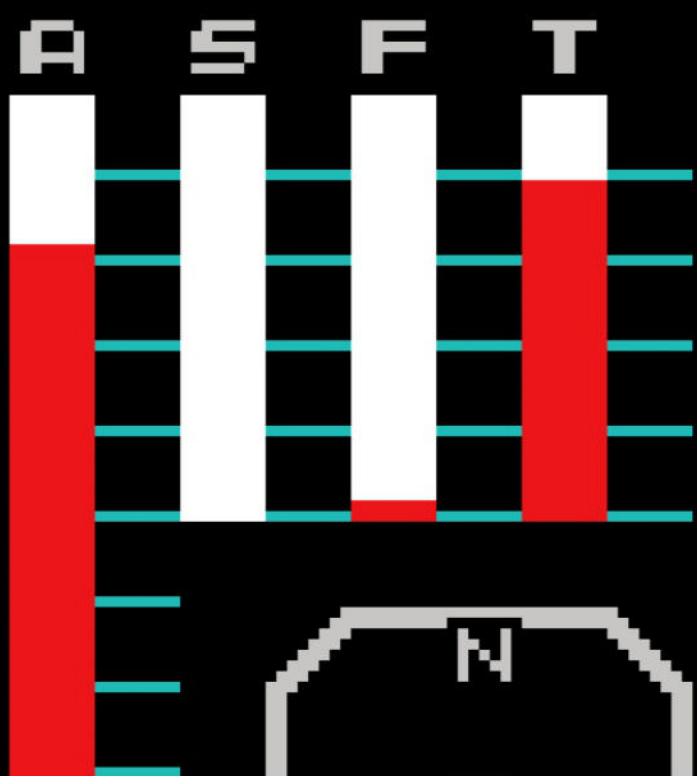
Taking control of a helicopter, you must navigate *Cyclone*'s many islands in search of supply crates. As you go about your task you'll earn additional points for any refugees you find dotted about the archipelago and can collect.

It sounds straightforward enough, but there's a number of factors to consider, not least the cyclone of the title, a deadly force of nature that can cause your helicopter to crash if you get too close to it. Another interesting gameplay wrinkle is that you'll often need to switch viewpoints as some crates are hidden from your immediate view, which makes your retrieval of the precious cargo that little bit more challenging.

Add in wayward jet fighters that patrol larger stretches of water, the need to constantly keep your eye on your altitude and fuel and the somewhat finicky nature of the controls and *Cyclone* is a game that constantly keeps you on your toes.

It might not have the immediate accessibility of *Tornado Low Level* and it can certainly be frustrating at times, but there's a lovely pull to Costa's game that makes it impossible to ignore. Here's hoping a company like Blaze can find a way to reissue Costa's back catalogue, as it really is quite a remarkable legacy. ★





VIEW
NORTH



S 150
H 50



DANGER

20 Years of The NINTENDO



NINTENDO'S QUIRKY HARDWARE DESIGN MAY HAVE RAISED A FEW EYEBROWS TWO DECADES AGO, BUT THE BRILLIANT GAMES IT ENABLED DREW IN PLAYERS REGARDLESS OF AGE OR GENDER. RETRO GAMER SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE WHO MADE, SOLD AND DEVELOPED GAMES FOR THE DS AS WE CELEBRATE THE BEST-SELLING HANDHELD EVER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

DS



We're going to pose a question to you all, and we want you to answer it

honestly. If someone had told you in 2004 that Nintendo was about to abandon the Game Boy, would you have believed them? While each of Nintendo's home consoles to that point had sold less than its predecessor, the Game Boy family of consoles had been the company's golden goose, a reliable set of earners and a brand that had become synonymous with handheld gaming as a whole over its 15-year history. So *of course* Nintendo wouldn't do that, it would be a ludicrous thing to do. However, history tells us that while it took a while, that's exactly what Nintendo did – and it was all thanks to the Nintendo DS.

The Nintendo DS was first announced in a press statement in January 2004, with Nintendo's president Satoru Iwata stating, "We have developed Nintendo DS based upon a completely different concept from existing

game devices in order to provide players with a unique entertainment experience for the 21st century." Nintendo revealed that the console would have two three-inch screens and two processors, with GamesIndustry.biz noting in some reports that the screens would be backlit and the processors would be an ARM9 and an ARM7 – all of which turned out to be accurate. Nintendo teased that the initial announcement was "but a glimpse of the additional features and benefits" that would be revealed in full at E3 that year, and that the system would be marketed separately to the GameCube and Game Boy Advance.

When Reggie Fils-Aime pulled out the DS during Nintendo's E3 presentation in Los Angeles, he dubbed it the "developer's system" and said, "In creating DS, we've given the world's most talented game makers new tools to work with, new ways to express their imaginations and of course, in the end, new

"NINTENDO HAVE A KNACK OF MIXING THINGS UP JUST ENOUGH TO FORCE DEVELOPERS TO THINK OBLIQUELY"
PAUL HUGHES

enjoyment for all of us. DS not only changes Nintendo, it changes our industry." The system boasted full 3D graphics, the lower display functioned as a touch-screen, and there was a microphone too. A variety of games and tech demos were shown,

with a handheld version of *Super Mario 64* doing the most to turn heads. Reactions to the new machine were mixed. While the DS was undoubtedly a step up from the Game Boy Advance, it wasn't a graphical match for Sony's PlayStation Portable and some worried that Nintendo was leaning too heavily on gimmicks.

How did developers feel about it? "The first DS was a bit chunky to be honest, and in the early days I think developers struggled to tame the hardware and use it to their advantage," says Paul Hughes, who worked on a variety of *Lego* games for the DS at TT Games. "But all said and done, it had 3D hardware, and frankly it was by Nintendo – you never

Interviewees



MATTHEW CASTLE

THEN Games editor, *NGamer*
NOW Senior producer, We Are Reach



PAUL HUGHES

THEN *Lego Star Wars The Complete Saga*, *Lego Batman: The Videogame*
NOW Head of technology, Ripstone



PAUL MACHACEK

THEN *Diddy Kong Racing DS*, *Viva Pinata Pocket Paradise*
NOW Director of quality, Rare



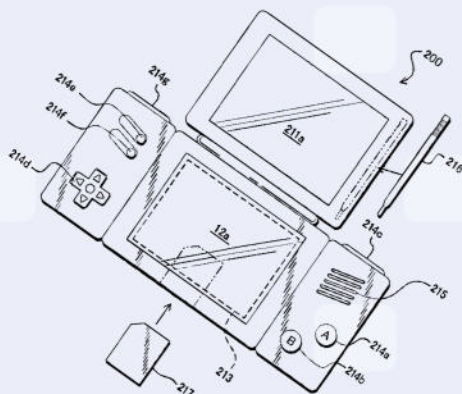
SIMON MILLER

THEN Games editor, *nRevolution*
NOW Progress Wrestling Proteus Champion



PAUL MONAGHAN

THEN Gamestation, HMV
NOW Editor, *Pixel Addict*



» Here's one of the very earliest concepts for the DS, as shown in the console's US patent.



» [DS] Seeing the revolutionary *Super Mario 64* squeezed onto a handheld and updated was mighty impressive.

► write off Nintendo hardware, they have a knack of mixing things up just enough to force developers to think obliquely and pull off some original games tailored to whatever new hardware quirk came along."

Paul Machacek, who worked on Rare's DS games, didn't feel it to be as odd a design as some did. "When I

first saw it there was a familiarity already. Back in the Eighties when Nintendo were doing their *Game & Watch* line, some of those devices were clamshell folding with two screens, so it felt as if they were simply bringing that form factor up to date with modern games on carts," he tells us, before explaining the challenges posed by the new inputs. "Whilst there were PDAs which had touch-screens, the DS was aimed at gaming and so there would be a shift in thinking for controller-based developers to embrace this new interface. There would be a jump for traditional console developers to think about using a second screen and touch. It really then came down to designing bespoke experiences for this new platform, or cherry-picking existing games to bring across that would fit nicely."

Matthew Castle, who covered DS games regularly in *NGamer*, admits, "I'm not sure I fully appreciated the DS at first glance. Back then you often thought about new hardware in terms of graphical grunt, and I was a bit too eager to focus on how good *Mario 64*

looked on a handheld, rather than the potential of its strange form factor. A handheld N64 is an attractive pitch, but it's definitely not how I think of the DS now. It was the weirdness of what followed, enabled by its dual screens and colourful inputs, that really resonated."

What of the claims that the DS would be a 'third pillar' of Nintendo's hardware strategy? "I hoped it was true because I loved the GBA," says Simon Miller, who regularly covered the DS in *nRevolution*. "It was never going to happen, though, because it would've been nuts. Why would a developer invest time in the GBA when you have the DS pushing things forward? I seem to remember some games got dual releases but again, it meant whatever happened to the GBA version wasn't the real deal – the innovation aspects had been taken out. It also always makes sense to stride forward and leave the last iteration in the past. There's never a need to try and hedge your bets that way. If you're done, you're done!"

The Nintendo DS launched on 21 November 2004 in North America, followed by Japan on 2 December. Demand in these two territories was enormous and Nintendo had already shipped 2.8 million consoles by the end of the year,

exceeding the company's own forecasts by 800,000. In 2005, Australia received the system on 24 February and Europe followed on 11 March. Paul Monaghan, editor of *Pixel Addict* magazine, remembers the build-up to the DS launch while working at Gamestation. "With a strong launch line-up you were expected to push the bundles ranging from

"THE EARLY TITLES WERE ALWAYS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BE MARKETABLE BUT ALSO SHOW OFF WHAT THE MACHINE COULD DO"
SIMON MILLER

FOLDABLE FAMILY WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FOUR DS MODELS?



DS 2004

► The original model of the DS definitely isn't the prettiest, but doesn't have any major disadvantages when it comes to playing games. Battery life is solid and while it has the smallest screens of the range, they're certainly adequate. Game Boy Advance cartridges fit into their slot nicely too.



DS Lite 2006

► With a sleek look inspired by Apple's devices of the time, the DS Lite is smaller and lighter than its predecessor, with better battery life and brighter screens. Other than smaller shoulder buttons, the only downside is that Game Boy Advance games stick out awkwardly from their shallow cartridge slot.



DSi 2008

► This model ditches the Game Boy Advance slot, and adds a faster CPU, more RAM and 256MB internal storage for downloadable DSiWare games. There are also two 0.3 megapixel cameras. Importers beware – DSi-enhanced games are region locked on DSi hardware, but will work normally on earlier models.



DSi XL 2009

► The final DS has exactly the same features as the DSi, but is aimed at an older audience. It's larger and heavier than the prior models, with screens that are 93% larger than those of the original DSi. It's less common than its older siblings, so generally sells for more.



» Eager customers line up at Virgin Megastores for the record-breaking UK launch of the DS.

£104.99 to around £200 including carry cases, extra stylus and of course games. The likes of *Super Mario 64 DS* and *WarioWare: Touched!* were in high demand, *Zoo Keeper* and *Project Rub* a close second tier and then the rest were mainly picked up as afterthoughts."

LAunch day itself was hectic. "The Gamestation I worked in was inside a Blockbuster Video store. This meant we closed at 10pm on Thursday evening, and had two hours to prepare all customer orders to reopen the doors at midnight," he continues. "Consoles were matched up with the desired games and accessories and before we knew it, it was all systems go until 1am. One full hour of excited customers, keeping a queue moving whilst trying to upsell more DS-related product where possible. Some customers hadn't preordered but were still happy to leave with a game for the DS, as any orders not collected by the end of the weekend would be sold on the Monday. Harsh, I know, but demand was huge!" It certainly was – UK customers bought nearly 87,000 DS consoles in its first two days on the market, breaking the record set by the GameCube in 2002.

While sales were strong, some of the early software reflected how developers were still trying to figure out how best to use the hardware. Games that didn't utilise both screens well and employ the touch-screen well tended to be criticised for not making the most of the console's unique features, but the games that incorporated them heavily often came across as experiments as much as full-fledged games.

Pac-Pix was described as "little more than a tech demo that's been painfully stretched to breaking point" by *games™* and GameSpot's review of *Yoshi Touch & Go* said that, "The novelty of the gameplay is almost palpable, but so are the game's tech demo roots."

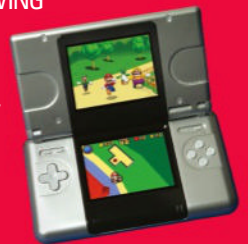
Simon agrees that some games came across that way, but quickly qualifies that. "I don't think I minded that, though. Admittedly dropping full-priced money on games that weren't fully realised wasn't ideal but at the same time, that felt par for the course. It was the same for the Wii a few years later. The early titles were always trying to figure out how to be marketable but also show off what the machine could do," he recalls. "I think there's a reason we don't talk about *Yoshi Touch & Go* these days and I bet Nintendo knew this, otherwise it would've been a fully fledged *Mario* game. We can't put the mascot in jeopardy, though, so the poor dinosaur takes the heat instead!"

"In the same way it took a few years to appreciate that the DS' strengths lay in its idiosyncrasies, it took a while to rewire our brains as to what a good DS game was," says Matthew. "I avoided a lot of the earlier 'tech demo' games because reviews scared me off – I don't think critics had the right mindset or language to talk about them in a valuable way. Reviewers saw very short experiences for £30 and dissuaded you on a 'bang for your buck' basis. Whereas now, I think people are a bit more appreciative of one-of-a-kind experiences or games that feel tailored to their hardware. I yearn for interactions that feel this bespoke. Perhaps that's an easier stance to have when you can Hoover up oddball offerings for a tenner at CEX."

THE DS BEFORE TIME

LOOKING BACK AT THE HANDHELD'S FIRST E3 SHOWING

While we wouldn't say that Nintendo rushed the DS to market, it certainly wasn't ready for prime time when it was first unveiled at E3 2004. Because the original retail model of the DS looks a bit ungainly next to the DS Lite and DSi, it's easy to forget that it was considered to be a marked improvement over the somewhat cheap-looking prototype. This early hardware has a few notable differences, most obviously the swapped positions of the Power button and the Start and Select buttons, hinges positioned at the edges of the device rather than centrally, and a more rounded d-pad.



» We're glad Nintendo reworked the DS before it came out, because this thing isn't pretty.

Although the console was only six months from launch, very few of the eventual launch games were on show. *Super Mario 64 DS* and *WarioWare: Touched!* were in advanced states, and *Metroid Prime Hunters* would become the console's pack-in demo. Other showings primarily consisted of tech demos, with varied fates. *Pac-Pix* and *Pac 'N Roll* would eventually be developed into full releases, as would *Balloon Trip*, which became *Yoshi Touch & Go*. Demos featuring Mario's face and Pikachu, were stripped back and became small parts of full games.

Others never went anywhere, including a demo in which you rubbed the screen to make Sonic run, and ones in which you used the touch-screen to carve objects and play table hockey. Most interestingly the *Submarine* tech demo would never become a full DS game, but was instead developed into *Steel Diver*, which was a 3DS launch game in 2011.



» [DS] It's surprising that *Submarine* didn't resurface until the 3DS arrived, it's quite good.



» [DS] We're not surprised that *Table Hockey* never went far – it demonstrates touch well, but that's it.

GET CONNECTED

HOW DID THE DS INTERACT WITH OTHER NINTENDO CONSOLES AND GAMES?

Game Boy Advance

■ A number of early DS games offer little bonuses if they detect a related game in the Game Boy Advance slot of your console. For example, you'll get extra costumes in *Frogger: Helmet Chaos*, or a new ability in *Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire Of The Rift*. The most extensive use of connectivity is found in the *Pokémon* games, which allow you to bring your Pokémon into the newer games via the Pal Park area.

Other DS software used Slot 2 for accessories, including the Guitar Grip for *Guitar Hero: On Tour*, a paddle controller for *Arkanoid DS* and a RAM expansion cartridge for the Nintendo DS Browser. The Rumble Pak was bundled with *Metroid Prime Pinball* and supported by about 50 other games. Most interestingly, an expansion pack for *Daigasso! Band Brothers* was released on a Game Boy Advance cartridge in 2005 – a concept that was sadly never revisited.



Wii

■ While it was possible to download DS game demos from your Wii via the Nintendo Channel, the two systems occasionally connected in games too. Some offered small bonuses, like the extra world unlocked when you connect *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* on both platforms, as well as standard features like character transfer between *Animal Crossing: Wild World* and *Animal Crossing: City Folk*. *Driver: San Francisco* didn't connect to a handheld game – a second player could just view the map and place roadblocks using the touch-screen.

Some games were more adventurous – for example, the Japan-only release *Simple 2000 Series Wii Vol 1: The Table Game* allows you to use the DS as a controller, with its display allowing you to keep your hand private in multiplayer card games. Then there was the action RPG *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes Of Time*, which allowed for up to four Wii and DS systems to connect together for online or offline multiplayer.



► Fortunately, it was apparent that bigger things were around the corner at E3 in 2005. Nintendo announced the Game Boy Micro, but the final GBA model was something of an afterthought – Nintendo was going all in on the DS. “I thought this E3 was the time when the DS was truly born. What with the Wi-Fi, *Mario*, *Metroid* and co it seems like now we are going to be able to really experience what Nintendo had intended from the beginning,” wrote *Cube* magazine reader Randy_Pan in 2005. The magazine agreed, saying that “the lack of decent releases” was holding the system back in the present, but noting that in Japan, “The DS is consistently outselling Sony’s machine week after week, and it’s all down to strong software such as *Nintendogs*, *Kirby’s Magical Paintbrush*, *Gundam SD* and *Brain Training*.” The magazine felt that represented a “good indication of what could happen both here and in the US”.

“THE BIG CHALLENGE WAS REALLY WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT TOUCH”
PAUL MACHACEK

beyond online, it’s no-line”, just a couple of months later in July 2004, Satoru Iwata told the Japan Economic Foundation that “customers do not want online games”. While

he didn’t rule out the possibility of making online games, he did state his belief that “at the moment, most customers do not wish to pay the extra money for connection to the internet, and for some customers, connection procedures to the internet are still not easy”.

To its credit, Nintendo tried hard to overcome the problems Iwata had identified, starting by making the online gaming service free. Wireless internet access was still relatively uncommon, so Nintendo released a USB dongle to allow players to share their wired broadband connection to the DS. It also signed deals with McDonald’s in the USA and The Cloud in the UK to offer free Wi-Fi access to Nintendo DS users. Reportedly, 45% of first-week *Mario Kart DS* owners in America played online – a figure Nintendo proudly compared to the 18% of *Halo 2* owners that had played on Xbox Live in its first three weeks.

Then, there was *Nintendogs*. “I thought the casualness of *Nintendogs*, a new Tamagotchi, was really smart and it brought forward the notion of ‘comfort games’, games that are casual ongoing experiences, rather than tests of skill,” says Paul Machacek. The virtual pet game was a key release because it sold mostly to girls and young women, broadening the demographics of the console. It was not only the best-selling DS game in Europe in 2005, but eventually became the second best-seller

It has proved to be somewhat prophetic on a number of fronts. *Mario Kart DS* was not only the latest iteration

of a franchise beloved by core and casual gamers alike, but also represented Nintendo’s first big push into online gaming. That was something of a surprise, as the company had given mixed messages around its commitment in this area. While Reggie Fils-Aime had proudly trumpeted the console’s wireless connectivity at E3 2004, saying “it’s



» [DS] *Pac-Pix* wasn’t a long game, but it did show off what the DS could do rather well.



» [DS] *Nintendogs* revitalised the virtual pet formula and really broadened the appeal of the DS.



» [DS] The sales of the DS allowed publishers to take risks on properties like *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*.

for the console of all time. When asked to name favourite DS games, Paul Hughes says "I'm guessing everyone said *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training!* What a lovely use of the touch-screen – holding it like a book!" When this game made its way outside of Japan in 2006, its concept of daily mental exercises proved very appealing to adults, and sold by the bucketload to become the console's fourth best-selling game ever.

Why were those games able to succeed with audiences outside of

the usual gaming demographics? "I think it's because of the hardware," says Simon. "All of a sudden you could almost tailor your games to a wider audience because putting a stylus in someone's hand is far less intimidating than a controller. I'm sure we've all played an FPS with someone not well versed and they spend the whole time looking up and spinning around. You've gotta get that down before anything else. With the DS, just use the pen, essentially."

Nintendo quickly sought to capitalise on its expanded audience in 2006. The new DS Lite refined the look of the console, and the Touch! Generations branding was introduced to highlight games that offered a broad appeal and simple touch-screen controls. Print adverts showed a diverse range of players enjoying those games, while TV adverts would show Girls Aloud battling it out in *Mario Kart DS* and Sir Patrick Stewart using *Brain Training*. "It was the first gaming campaign that grew so big that other publishers started spoofing it," Matthew recalls. "I'll always chuckle at Steve Davis mimicking Nicole Kidman's *Brain*" ▶



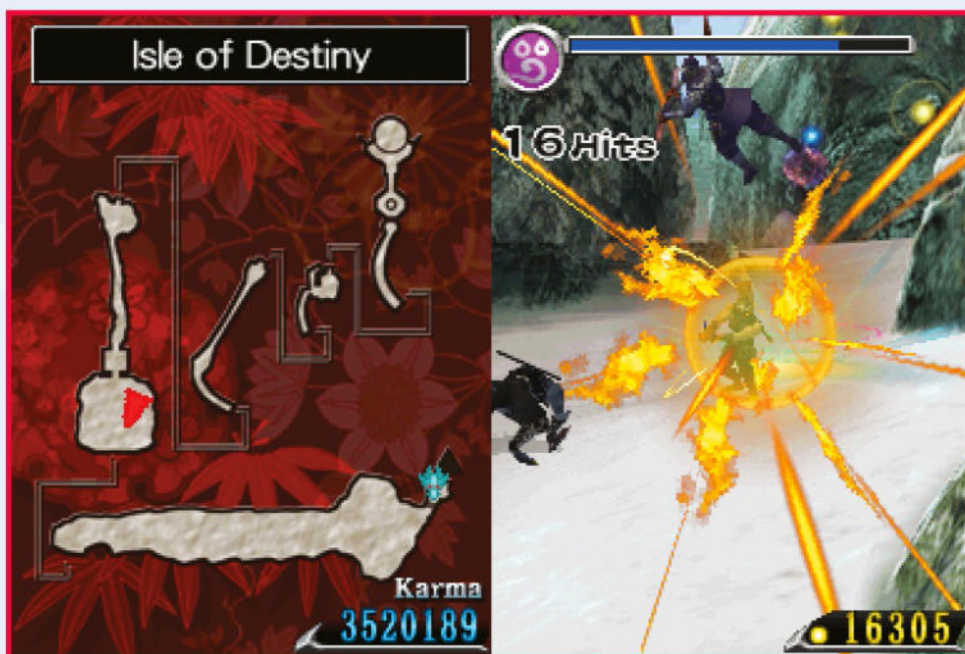
» The DS Lite boosted interest in the platform, resulting in major queues as seen at the Japanese launch.



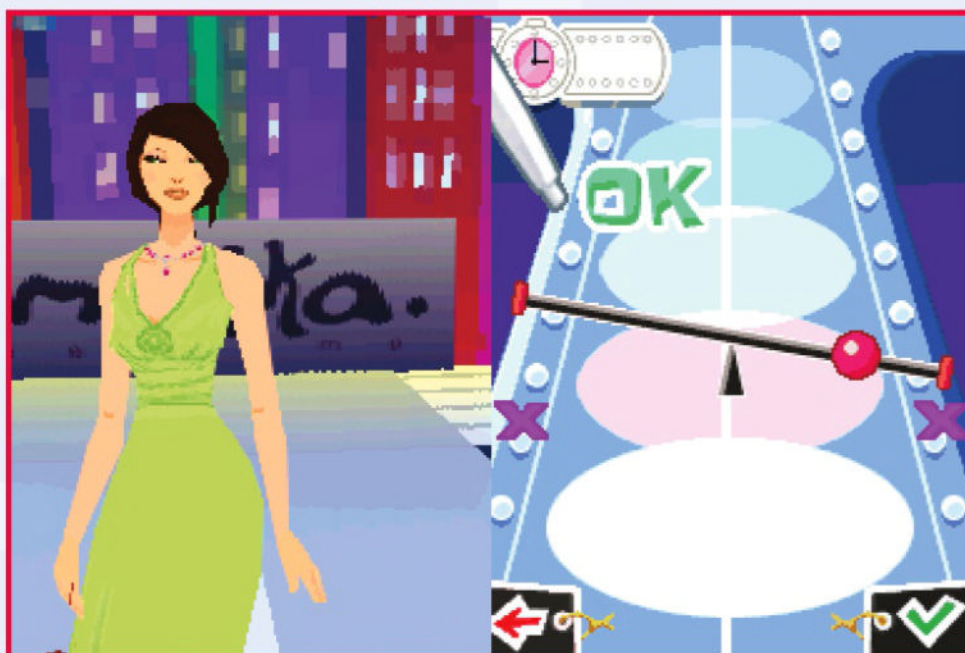
» [DS] *Cooking Mama* became an unexpectedly huge hit for the then-small publisher 505 Games.



» [DS] *New Super Mario Bros* sold a whopping 30.8 million copies, making it the console's most-popular game.



» [DS] Action games rarely used the 'book-style' DS orientation, but *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword* did.



» [DS] Games like Ubisoft's *Imagine* range were dismissed as shovelware, but they served the expanded DS audience.

► Training advert to promote a DS snooker game." With the mid-year reveal of the Wii highlighting Nintendo's philosophy of lowering the barrier of entry to games via motion controls, it was clear that the company was no longer in the business of selling to gamers, so much as selling games to everyone.

Was it clear to Matthew that the DS was well on its way to becoming an enormous hit? "When ageing relatives mentioned the DS to me unprompted in late-2006 it was clear it was breaking out in a way videogames didn't normally," he confirms. "Also, the fact that sales of our Nintendo magazines didn't explode in tandem – it was so obvious we were talking to a fraction of the audience Nintendo was chasing. It's maybe a bit of a downer thinking about DS as being the result of clever marketing rather than my mum finally appreciating the inherent value of *Ace Attorney*, but it did feel that way."

Capcom's courtroom drama is an interesting game, because it's a truly beloved DS game.

"*Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* was lovely, with big and bold visuals, like an interactive manga comic," says Paul Hughes. Matthew agrees, saying, "The *Ace Attorney* series is an all-timer for me: its fusion of Shu Takumi's mystery writing, the rip-roaring score and storylines that paid off over multiple games felt like an anime you could play." However, the series was already up to its third entry on the GBA in Japan – it was only the success of the DS that convinced its publisher to take a chance on localising it, for which it was richly rewarded as the first game repeatedly sold out.

Other games that would have almost certainly never left Japan before, such as

ONLINE ESSENTIALS

Mario Kart DS

2005

Online multiplayer was a natural addition to the famous racing franchise, though it was a bit basic compared to local wireless play – races were limited to four players and 100cc speed, 12 of the tracks weren't playable, and items worked a little differently. It was still a hugely appealing proposition.



Animal Crossing: Wild World

2005

While you could only visit your friends' villages and all the residents disappeared when you did, the addition of online play felt like a natural addition to the *Animal Crossing* formula. It helped this sequel sell far more copies than the original, and set the series up for future success.



Tetris DS

2006

Tetris DS may not have been the first online *Tetris* game, but the series has always felt at home on handhelds and this is one of the best versions. You can play standard matches or the Push Mode against a single opponent, or take part in four-player matches with items.



Cooking Mama, were also localised to varying degrees of success. The DS soon became a platform with a hugely diverse range of games. "I think publishers were navigating uncharted territory," says Matthew. "Nintendo were rinsing the charts with virtual puppies, maths exercises and pub games, as well as excellent versions of some fan favourites; looking at that and extrapolating a winning formula must have been a nightmare. EA made an RPG, *Zubo*, about anthropomorphic drum people! It was absolutely baffling, but good fun seeing people scrabble for a piece of the pie."

Paul Machacek found himself working on the core end of the spectrum. "I suggested a port of *Diddy Kong Racing* for DS as it had been so successful a decade earlier, but knew that we needed to apply it appropriately to the hardware. There were also a few things in the original game that felt like they needed changing," he says. "We looked at the different hardware characteristics of the DS and tried to find features that could use them. The idea of blowing into the microphone to get a turbo boost was a quick off-the-cuff idea. Recording your own sounds with the microphone and applying them to in-game events was unique and allowed people to customise the game with the extra comedy of other players experiencing such sounds in multiplayer."

"The big challenge was really what do we do about touch," he remembers. "A member of the team suggested adding more tracks (which we did do) because 'more is better!' but I didn't agree with that standard sequel approach, and it didn't feel like a DS-specific thing to do. But 'touch' and 'new tracks' lingered and I suggested why don't we

“WHILE IT’S TRUE DS HAD A LOT OF GAMES OUTSIDE OF THAT TRADITIONAL SCENE, IT WAS REALLY HOT ON SEVERAL CORE GENRES”
MATTHEW CASTLE

allow players to draw their own track?" Paul's idea stuck, and the team got to work. "We hacked out the basics of this pretty quickly. It had to be easy, fun, so we went with a set of standard block track pieces that could

link together, and by drawing a squiggly line that would join up with itself we could then turn that into a corresponding track with the building-block track pieces. To keep collision detection easier and not have to worry about off-track scenery and furniture, we put it up in the sky so that if you drove off the track you would fall."

Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise was an easier adaptation for the team at Rare.

"Viva Piñata naturally lends itself so well to touch, with a stylus, because you can accurately point at things, click on them and control a shovel to directly terraform the garden with the stylus," explains Paul Machacek. "We were only going to put the garden in one screen, the touch-screen predominantly, and we designed a HUD with icons to access the tools, seeds and shop. There is a second important part of the game though as well with the Encyclopaedia, and being able to have that on the top screen for direct reference really helped simplify the game. We allowed players to swap the screens around so that you could touch the Encyclopaedia pages and everything in them (Pinatas, plants, seeds, tools, etc) were shown using standard unique icons which were clickable."

Paul Hughes remembers the challenges of trying to adapt multiplayer games for the unique hardware. "Certainly, with the first



» [DS] *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* lets you use the force using the touch-screen.



» [DS] Both Matthew and Simon cite *Hotel Dusk* as one of their favourite DS games.

WHEN NINTENDO FINALLY EMBRACED ONLINE GAMING, IT DID SO IN STYLE



Metroid Prime Hunters

2006

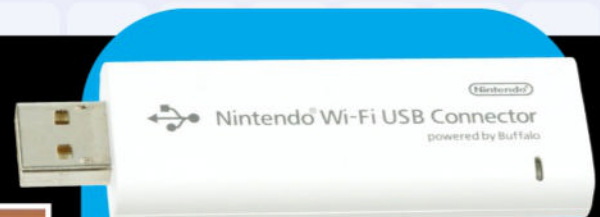
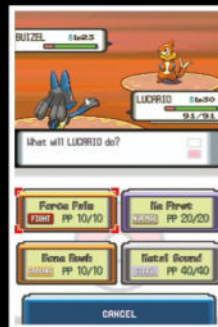
□ A good first-person shooter has always been a key component of any console's online offering, and *Metroid Prime Hunters* fit the bill. It was one of the best-looking DS games when it launched, with a control scheme that allowed for precision aiming – and maybe the odd hand cramp.



Pokémon Diamond & Pearl

2006

□ The *Pokémon* series had always encouraged social gameplay, and players endeavouring to catch 'em all finally gained the ability to battle and trade Pokémon with friends around the world, rather than just the ones who happened to be within range of a link cable. This was a real killer app.



PLAY TODAY

□ The official Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection service was closed in 2014. However, some of the most popular DS games are still playable online thanks to the Wiimmfi community project, including all five here. For more information, head to kaeru.world and follow the Kaeru WFC instructions – you can do it without modifying your DS, simply by changing DNS settings. You'll need a router capable of using WEP security since that's the only type the DS supports, but this security is very outdated and weak so proceed at your own risk.

HOME BREW AND THE HIGH SEAS

HOW FLASH CARDS ENABLED HOBBYISTS AND INFURIATED PUBLISHERS

■ Nintendo has always been fiercely protective of its intellectual property rights, and rarely did it have more reason to be than with the DS. Flash cartridges were developed early, with the first generation generally using a DS card to bypass the console's security and the Game Boy Advance slot to actually load data. During the first couple of years of the console's life, piracy wasn't the biggest concern, but by October 2006 a forum user on a popular Nintendo homebrew site was already wondering if DS piracy was "getting too rampant".

The situation was put beyond doubt in early 2007 with the introduction of the R4 Revolution card, a simple device that just required a MicroSD card to store games. There was no need to frequent dodgy shops to find it either, as the R4 was widely available on sites like eBay and Amazon. Such cards were naturally advertised as a way for homebrew developers to run their games on real hardware, and there were some genuinely great games – the obvious likes of *Doom* and *Quake* were joined by an excellent touch-screen version of *Lemmings*, *PuzzleManiak* and *Warcraft: Tower Defense*. However, as Mike Jackson from CVG noted in 2008, "It may not say so in bold letters on the box, but these cards are popular purely because they run illegally downloaded DS games."

By January 2008, the trade body ELSPA claimed that, "In America it's thought 90% of DS users are playing pirated games," a claim that *Next Generation* advised you take with "a Texas-sized grain of salt". But it was a real issue and Nintendo tried to persuade the retailers to ban the products while launching various legal actions, and had over half-a-million R4 cards and other such devices seized between January 2009 and 31 July 2010 according to *MCV*. A specialist IP court in the UK ruled that devices like the R4 were illegal in July 2010 – but by that point, *MCV* noted that "developers and publishers have reduced their DS output" as the system's commercial prospects were weakened by piracy, and the 3DS had already been announced.



» An example of the dual-slot flash cards that existed in the early days of the DS.

STOP PRESS

SHOPS TOLD – STOP

It's becoming harder to obtain a so-called "piracy card" for the DS. SimplyGames.com has dropped the sale of the controversial R4 device and pressure has been applied to Amazon.co.uk and eBay. The card lets gamers play homebrew games but also allows copying of full-price software. Nintendo has been monitoring the situation and ELSPA is considering taking legal action.

» By 2008, Nintendo's struggles against the R4 were starting to hit the headlines regularly.



» Nintendo was able to produce far more units than it had forecast, but still struggled with early demand.



» [DS] *Viva Pinata: Pocket Paradise* used some pre-rendered graphics because they were less taxing on the hardware.



» [DS] The localised release of *Elite Beat Agents* was a response to the import popularity of *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!*.

► few *Lego* games we did our level best to match the core mechanics of their console brethren, but at the same time knew that due to the dual screens we could add extra minigames to make up for bits that we were forced to miss," he explains. "For example, we couldn't have a full character party on-screen at the same time, so we had to swap in the co-op character via the touch screen. But then on *Star Wars* we had the dual screen rendered AT-AT section on Hoth tying up their legs, or the lightsaber training with Luke."

One game that Paul Hughes remains particularly proud of is *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga*.

"Just getting the entire console game crammed into 64MB was a Herculean feat; especially as we went for all digital audio – I had chance to use John Williams' score played by the London Philharmonic, I was going to make that happen by hook or by crook," he recalls. "The camera and control systems were tailored for the DS as it only had digital d-pad input so we didn't want to hamper the player hitting tricky diagonals whilst the camera shifted around. Add to that we had to be very careful with camera framing to make sure you saw far enough ahead to not get 'pounced on', but at the same time to not blow the 4,000 vertex limit which would cause chunks of polygons to disappear."

The DS hit its commercial peak in 2008. That same year, *Forbes'* Brian Caulfield noted



» DS Download Stations could be found in various public locations, and let players download game demos.



» *Scrubs* stars Zach Braff and Donald Faison enjoy a spot of something. *Trauma Center*, maybe?

that Apple's iPhone had the touch and motion controls that had made Nintendo's DS and Wii so successful, and that, "The ability to pour fresh software into the iPhone, wirelessly, at the touch of a button" via the new App Store could cause Nintendo problems. The DS got its own downloadable game store the same year, but it was only available to owners of the new DSi model. Meanwhile, the 2009 mobile game *Angry Birds* could easily have been a DS game, and by 2011 *PCWorld* opined that "The Nintendo DS and the Sony PSP are still selling, but these portable game gadgets seem like relics from an era when people used cell phones strictly to make and receive calls." Nintendo released the 3DS that year, and while the backwards compatible successor to the DS was a popular machine, it never came close to the heights of the original, which is still the best-selling handheld of all time with a staggering 154 million units sold.

Some players are quick to deride this era of Nintendo, bemoaning a 'casual' focus and pointing to shovelware like *Russell Grant's Astrology* or *Ubisoft's much-derided Imagine* series. "While it's true DS had a lot of games outside of that traditional scene, it was really hot on several core genres," Matthew points out. "Square Enix did beautiful JRPG work with the *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*

"THE EASE OF PICK UP AND PLAY GAMING WAS BROUGHT TO THE MAINSTREAM AND NINTENDO WANTED EVERYONE TO BE PART OF THAT"
PAUL MONAGHAN

remakes, Atlus were drowning us in *Shin Megami* spin-offs, and there were loads of weeb-y adventure games and visual novels for Japanophiles." The console really does cater for all tastes, from the ridiculous shoot-'em-up action of *Bangai-O Spirits* to the sedate puzzles of *Polarium*. In fact, the console's best-selling game

was *New Super Mario Bros* – an extremely traditional revival of the 2D platforming formula that made the character famous.

"Nintendo managed to master the whole age range with the DS (and later Wii), they just had that magic formula," says Paul Monaghan, summarising the appeal of the console. "Game series such as *Mario* and *Zelda* catered for gaming diehards and non-gamers or those returning to the hobby would eagerly buy *Brain Training*, the *Professor Layton* titles or even the many shovelware titles featuring classic puzzles. The ease of pick-up-and-play gaming was brought to the mainstream and Nintendo wanted everyone to be part of that. Being able to interact with games with the stylus helped you feel more involved and just like the original advertising campaign requested – you just had to touch it."

And really, you still do have to touch it. As the Wii U's Virtual Console releases proved, the unique features of the DS mean that its games just don't quite feel the same on other devices. So get some friends together, send crude drawings to each other in *Pictochat* and then blast each other with blue shells in *Mario Kart DS* – you won't regret a moment of it. ✳



» *Pictochat* was built into every DS, and was a fun way to chat between games.



» [DS] *Chrono Trigger* saw its first official European release on the DS in 2008. Yes, it took that long.



» [DS] *Advance Wars* took a less cheery turn in *Dark Conflict*, or *Days Of Ruin* to our American friends.

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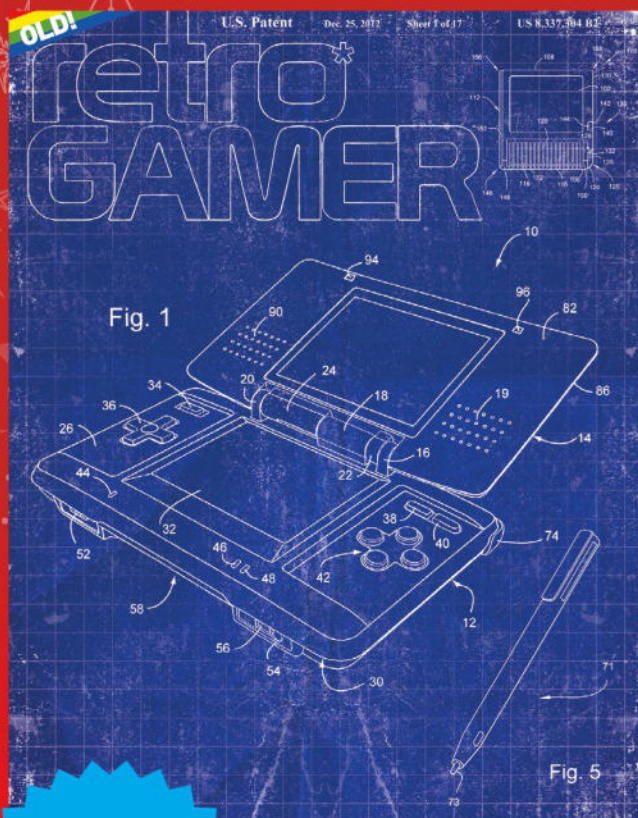


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THE MAKING OF Wizardry

PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
SIR-TECH
- » **DEVELOPER:**
SIR-TECH
- » **PLATFORM:**
APPLE II, DOS, FM-7, PC-98, MAC, PC-98, SHARP X1, MSX, COMMODORE 64/128, NES, GAME BOY COLOR, WONDERSWAN COLOR, NINTENDO SWITCH
- » **RELEASED:**
1981
- » **GENRE:**
RPG



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GALACTIC ATTACK (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: APPLE II

RELEASED: 1980

STAR MAZE

PLATFORM: APPLE II, COMMODORE 64, ATARI 8-BIT

RELEASED: 1982

WIZARDRY II: THE KNIGHT OF DIAMONDS

PLATFORM: APPLE II, FM-7, PC-98, PC-98, SHARP X1, DOS, COMMODORE 64/128, MSX, MAC, NES, GAME BOY COLOR

RELEASED: 1982

THE CREATORS OF THE INFLUENTIAL 1981 RPG – WHICH WENT ON TO INSPIRE COUNTLESS TITLES, FROM DRAGON QUEST TO FINAL FANTASY – EXPLAIN HOW IT HAD ITS ORIGIN IN SOME OF THE EARLIEST ONLINE EXPERIENCES, AND WAS ONE OF THE FIRST COMPUTER GAMES TO COME IN A BOX

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

Few games have been as influential as *Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord*. Even if you haven't played it, you will have undoubtedly played games that were inspired by it. Indeed, after discovering the game during a trip to Apple Fest in San Francisco in 1983, Koichi Nakamura and Yuji Horii used *Wizardry's* battles as the basis for *Dragon Quest*, mixing them with the overhead perspective of *Ultima*. Yuji has even said that *Dragon Quest's* ubiquitous Slimes were directly inspired by the slime monsters in *Wizardry*.

Along with Richard Garriott's *Ultima*, which was released for the Apple II at almost the same time in 1981, *Wizardry* has been credited with popularising computer RPGs, bringing them to a wide audience for the first time, and setting the template for others to follow. But *Wizardry* itself was inspired by earlier RPGs. "I was a huge D&D player, and also I was very heavily influenced by some really great games on the PLATO system that I had access to at college," says Robert Woodhead, co-creator of *Wizardry*. PLATO was a pioneering networked computer system that was home to some of the earliest online games. It was "at least ten years ahead of its time, if not twenty," Robert says. "Basically, everything you love about the internet and computer games was beta tested on PLATO."

One title that had a big influence on *Wizardry* was the multiplayer dungeon crawler *Oubliette* (1977). In fact, Robert was so obsessed with *Oubliette* and other *Dungeons & Dragons*-inspired PLATO games that he was suspended from Cornell University for spending too much time playing them. It was during this "enforced

sabbatical", as he describes it, that he met Norman Sirotek. Norman's father and Robert's mother had a joint venture involving resin-sand moulds, and they brought in Robert to create an Apple II program for calculating rail-shipping rates. Norman drove Robert out to the Trenton Computer Festival to show off the program in 1979, and on the drive back, Sirotech Software was born. "I said, 'Look, you want to make games, I know more about business than you do, so why don't we form an entity?'" Norman recalls. "'You make it, I sell it.'"

Sirotech released the Apple II space combat simulator *Galactic Attack* in 1980, after which the firm became Sir-Tech to sever the link with the Sirotek family name. "We kept getting phone calls at home, people looking for hints and guides and all the rest

"I WAS VERY HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY SOME REALLY GREAT GAMES ON THE PLATO SYSTEM"

ROBERT WOODHEAD

» [Apple II] Adventurers should be wary of opening chests: some of them are secured by traps that need to be disarmed.





» [Apple II] Some of the earliest and lowliest enemies you face in *Wizardry* are Slimes, which Yuji Horii transposed into *Dragon Quest*.



» Robert Woodhead co-created *Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord* with the late Andrew C. Greenberg. He later cofounded AnimEigo, which distributes Japanese films and anime.



» Norman Sirotek cofounded the publisher Sir-Tech with Robert Woodhead, which would become famous for the *Wizardry* and *Jagged Alliance* series.



» Robert Sirotek joined his brother at Sir-Tech, and remained there until the closure of Sir-Tech Canada in 2003. He's now CEO of the newly formed SirTech Entertainment Corp.



» Justin Bailey founded the Fig crowdfunding platform and was COO at Double Fine. He joined Digital Eclipse as an advisor, later becoming head of publishing, before leaving in October 2024.

of it to play the games," says Norman. "At 3am, you can only take so many of those phone calls, so we said, 'Look, why don't we drop the 'o' and insert a hyphen?'"

As a follow-up to *Galactic Attack*, Robert began working on a *D&D*-inspired game called *Paladin*. But he heard that Andrew C. Greenberg at Cornell was also working on a dungeon game. Andrew, who sadly died in August 2024, was someone he knew through PLATO and *D&D*. "So I got in contact with him," Robert recalls, "and he had written a game in Apple BASIC that had a lot of interesting features." The game was called *Wizardry*, and the pair quickly formed a collaboration to pool their ideas. "It was obvious that we could do a better job working together than we could do working separately."

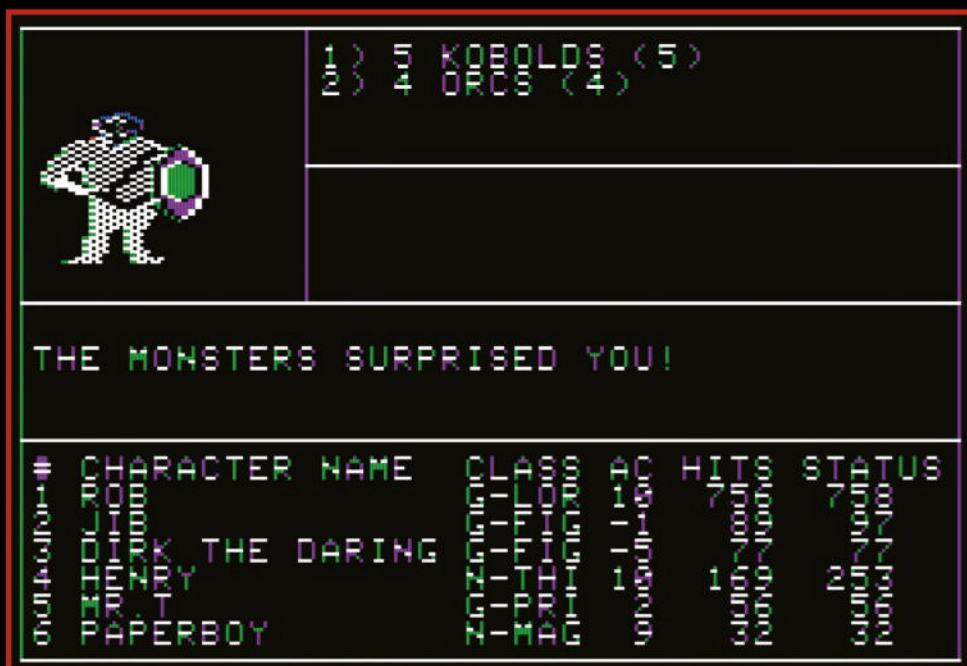
The first order of business was to ditch BASIC. "When Andy and I started working together and we looked at what he'd done, it was pretty much a no-brainer that we'd want to migrate all of his ideas into PASCAL," Robert says. PASCAL was a much more efficient coding language in terms of memory, and it had several features that made programs much easier to read and debug. In the process of migrating the game, it changed dramatically. "[Andrew] sat down with a blank sheet of paper to figure out the data structure design – what we would need in the dungeon, monsters, that sort of stuff – and basically, he used everything that he had learned in order to design the new game," Robert says. "I already had a sort of skeleton of what I thought the data structure design would be, and he just took that and went, 'This is good, this is good, that's shit,' and changed it all." ▶



» [Apple II] Robert Sirotek says that he and his brother deliberately stayed out of the limelight. "It was our desire to focus the press and the recognition and the credits on the people that created the game, and that was Robert Woodhead and Andrew Greenberg."



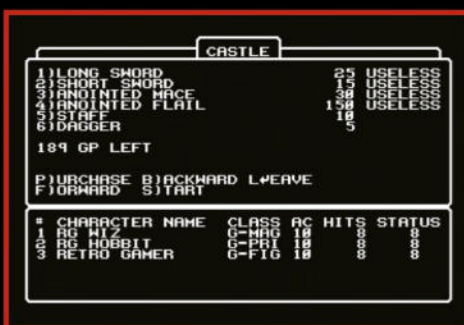
» [Apple II] In a charming touch, walking into walls generates prompts the game to say, "Ouch!"



» [Apple II] Being surprised by monsters puts you at a disadvantage, allowing them to attack before you can respond.



» [C64] Wizardry was finally ported to the Commodore 64/128 in 1987, some six years after its release on the Apple II.



» [C64] The graphical style of the C64 port of Wizardry I is closer to 1987's Wizardry IV than the 1981 Apple II original.

► The first four months of development were spent writing the editors for databases. "What most people don't understand is that *Wizardry* isn't really a game, it's a database engine with a very strange user interface," Robert notes. It was getting databases like the map editor, character editor and monster editor to fit into a reasonable amount of disk space that formed the trickiest part of development. "But once we had the databases, [Andrew] could start writing his stuff," Robert says, adding that a natural division of labour emerged where Andrew did the scenario design, while he focussed on programming. "The first version of the game only took a couple of months, and we were actually showing it to people maybe about nine or ten months before it was properly released."

Many of the mechanics of *Wizardry* weren't necessarily that original, since they drew heavily from existing PLATO games like *Oubliette*, *Avatar* and *D&D*. But these games relied on a connection to a powerful mainframe, and the genius of *Wizardry* is the way it squeezed all of that gameplay, including 3D dungeon corridors, onto "dinky little home computers", as Robert calls them. And *Wizardry*'s introduction of a player-controlled party of up to six characters was a real game-changer.

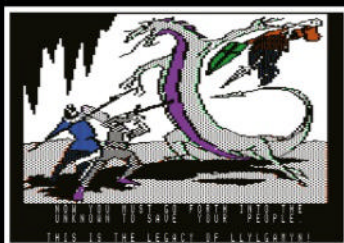
The plot of *Wizardry* sees adventurers attempting to prove their mettle over ten levels of dungeons beneath the castle of Trebor, the titular mad overlord. At the end lies the evil wizard Werdna. "It was

WIZARDS FOREVER



WIZARDRY II: THE KNIGHT OF DIAMONDS

■ This 1982 sequel is really more of an expansion, and requires players to import characters of at least level 13 from the original game. It features a quest for the Staff Of Gnilda in order to save the besieged city of Lllylgamyn.



WIZARDRY III: LEGACY OF LILLYGAMYN

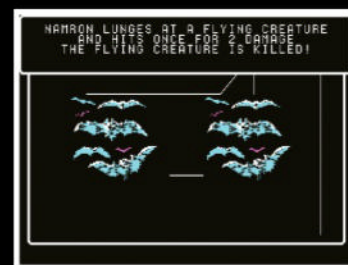
■ Released in 1983, *Wizardry III* once again requires players to import characters from a previous game, although this time they're cast as descendants of the original characters, since the game is set many years after *Wizardry II*.



WIZARDRY IV: THE RETURN OF WERDNA

■ *Wizardry IV* was much delayed, eventually releasing in 1987. It's different from the initial trilogy, since this time the player controls the evil wizard Werdna and must fight against heroes from previous games in an attempt to escape the dungeon.

THE MAINLINE SIR-TECH SEQUELS TO WIZARDRY



WIZARDRY V: HEART OF THE MAELSTROM

■ Robert Woodhead stepped away from the series for 1988's *Wizardry V*, which was based on a design by David W Bradley. But the gameplay remained broadly similar to the first three *Wizardry* titles, leading some reviewers to call it outdated.

THE MAKING OF: WIZARDRY: PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD

probably my idea to put us in the game with our names backwards," says Robert. "I actually think I got the better part of that deal, because Werdna got murdered about 500 million times over the years."

The game was first sold at Apple Fest in Boston in June 1981 under the working title *Dungeons Of Despair*. "It was basically a beta test version," Robert says. "It wasn't balanced. Like, it had the devil on level one. But it was set up so that we could test every feature of the game. That's what it was there for."

Norman's brother, Robert Sirotek, who had joined Sir-Tech a few months after it was founded, recalls that they sold 300-400 copies of *Dungeons Of Despair*, which was packaged in a plastic bag and sold at a discount. Buyers were told to report any problems directly to Sir-Tech so that the company could fix any issues before the official release. This version of the game would soon be relentlessly pirated, but that didn't worry the Sirotek brothers. Why? Because there was a bug that made it unwinnable, meaning the piracy helped to spread the word on the game without having an impact on sales. "They could play enough to get the experience, but at the end of the day they couldn't win, so they went out and bought the product," Robert Sirotek says.

"The bug was purely accidental," adds Norman, who recalls that Robert Woodhead was making last-minute patches and corrections to the code in their hotel room at the show just before the disks were duplicated, which is how the bug got introduced. "It was called the unset bug, because when you tried to do something,

you would get the message 'unset', and that was it, you could not get past it." Anyone who had bought the bugged version could send it back to Sir-Tech with their receipt to get it updated. "Everybody else who pirated it, they were out of luck. They had to go buy the game when it finally came out."

When the finished version of *Wizardry* was officially released in September 1981, it was a much more polished affair. It had copy protection, for a start (although this was soon cracked). But the most notable difference from the beta was that it came

"IT WAS PROBABLY MY IDEA TO PUT US IN THE GAME WITH OUR NAMES BACKWARDS"
ROBERT WOODHEAD

in a rather handsome box. Boxed games certainly weren't the norm at this time in the home-computer industry. *Ultima* was first released by California Pacific

Computer Company as a 5.25-inch disk and a handful of booklets in a Ziploc bag, and so was Sir-Tech's previous game, *Galactic Attack*. In fact, *Wizardry* might have also shipped in a bag if it wasn't for Softsel, one of very few software distributors at the time. The company had been built up by Robert Leff since 1980 after he bought the nascent distribution arm of Ken and Roberta Williams' On-Line Systems (which was renamed Sierra On-Line in 1982), and it would eventually become the software distribution giant Merisel. ▶



WIZARDRY VI: BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE

■ Helmed once again by David W Bradley, *Wizardry VI* from 1990 was generally regarded as a big improvement on its predecessor, introducing full-colour graphics and a detailed character creation process, along with a more involved plot.



WIZARDRY VII: CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT

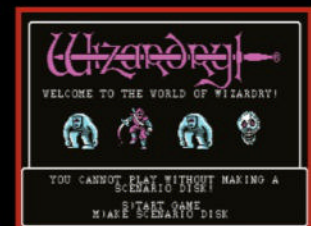
■ David W Bradley picked up where *Wizardry VI* left off with this 1992 sequel, which features a complex plot and a diplomacy mechanic involving different competing factions, as well as an open world of forests and cities to explore.



WIZARDRY 8

■ After a long hiatus, the mainline *Wizardry* series made its return in 2001 under lead designer Brenda Romero and producer Linda Currie. *Wizardry 8* rounded out the *Dark Savant* trilogy, and Sir-Tech would unfortunately close its doors some two years later.

» [WonderSwan Color] There have been dozens of original Japanese *Wizardry* games since the release of this WonderSwan Color port in 2003; the latest is 2024's *Wizardry Variants Daphne* for mobile phones.



» [DOS] Players must begin by creating a rewritable scenario disk, to which your progress is automatically saved: so death can't be avoided by loading an earlier save.



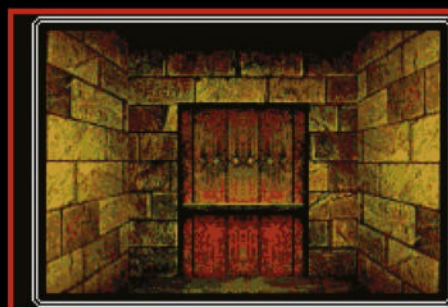
» [DOS] *Wizardry's* difficulty is legendary. Even the lowliest group of Scruffy Men (aka Bushwackers) can easily wipe out your level 1 party.



» [Apple II] Enemies have generic names and a lack of key information until you inspect them, but the Latumapic spell can be used to automatically identify enemies.



» [C64] Finding stairs – either down to lower levels of the dungeon or back up to the safety of the castle – is your key focus in *Wizardry*.



» [WonderSwan Color] After its release on Japanese computers in 1985, *Wizardry* became an enduring hit in Japan, eventually being released on the WonderSwan Color handheld in 2003.

After the showing at Apple Fest, Robert Leff was interested in picking up *Wizardry*, so he flew out to meet the Sir-Tech founders. "And during the meeting, he looked at us and said, 'Do me a favour: do not package this in a Ziploc bag,'" Norman recalls. "We always had visions of doing a more formal package, but on his confirmation of 'don't put it in a Ziploc bag', we decided, you know what, we're going to box this thing and make it more formal. We'll shrink wrap it, and we'll turn it into a product that you would normally find on a retail shelf – and that's how *Wizardry* got boxed."

And what a box it is. With its simple, bold design and mottled, reflective surface, it's easily one of the classiest game boxes ever made. Norman remembers it was sourced from a local vendor near to Sir-Tech. "I met with a box company in Syracuse. It was kind of funny, because I was like, early 20s, and this guy's got to be like, 65. And I show up on his doorstep, and I said, 'I need a box, and these are the dimensions I need, what can you give me?' And he said, 'Hey, I got a cool idea, I'll show you what we can do: we do hot stamping.' I said, 'Cool, show me what hot stamping does.' And that's how it went into a box with foil wrapping, because you can hot stamp foil wrapping, and you could do it as a flat colour or a reflective aluminium style. And I chose something that reflects, because as you're walking by, if the sun hits

"IF WIZARDRY HAD BEEN IN A ZIPLOC BAG, WHO KNOWS HOW SUCCESSFUL IT WOULD HAVE BEEN?"
ROBERT WOODHEAD



» [Apple II] "One of the more core principles of [Sir-Tech] was to make sure that authors got their due credit," says Robert Sirotek, which is why Robert Woodhead and Andrew Greenberg's names are front and centre on the box.

it or the lighting hits it the right way, it kind of sparkles off the box."

The iconic artwork of the coiled, Chinese-style dragon was provided by a local high-school art teacher called Rick Austin. "His name wasn't on it," Norman remembers, "and I said, 'Rick, put your name on the tail, put it somewhere on the packaging, get recognition for it.' And our deal with him is we own the art, but I wanted him to have his recognition, and that's why you see the name 'Austin' right by the tail."

Robert Woodhead thinks that the eye-catching box was key to *Wizardry's* success, although at the time it didn't seem such a big deal to him. "It took me 30 years to figure out that one of the most important things that happened when *Wizardry* was released was that it was put in a box. No other game at that time was released in boxes. Looking back at it with hindsight,

THE GRANDDADDY OF RPGS



THE BLACK ONYX

■ Released in 1984 and created by Henk Rogers (who would go on to play a key role in the story of *Tetris*), *The Black Onyx* is credited with helping to popularise RPGs in Japan. The first-person view is straight out of *Wizardry*, although the game itself is much simpler.



THE BARD'S TALE

■ *The Bard's Tale*, released in 1985 for the Apple II and ported to the Commodore 64 the following year, borrows heavily from *Wizardry's* playbook, but this immensely popular title expands on the concept with excellent colour graphics and sound.

if *Wizardry* had been in a Ziploc bag, who knows how successful it would have been? The box got people to pick it up."

The game's immediate, huge success on the Apple II took its creators somewhat by surprise. "Andy thought that maybe, if the game did well, it would pay off all of his school loans, and that would have been a huge success," recalls Robert Woodhead. "So after it did that in the first month, we're going like, 'What the hell?' And it's sort of like, 'OK, I guess we got to do another one.'"

But the real, lasting success of *Wizardry* was its impact on Japan, when it was ported to the FM-7, PC-98 and PC-88 in 1985. "I went over to Japan for several months when it was first being moved over onto the Japanese computers and helped with that effort," recalls Robert Woodhead, who worked with a company called Fortune on the localisation. "They just did an amazing job of writing UCSD PASCAL interpreters for all the Japanese machines, and once you have that, it's relatively straightforward to port the game."

Wizardry was so successful in Japan that it spawned nearly 40 different spin-offs and sequels from various Japanese developers, most of which have never been released in Europe or North America. But perhaps the game's biggest legacy was the way it laid the foundations for many of the tropes of Japanese RPGs, from party-based battles to spell-naming conventions. So the next time you slay a Slime in *Dragon Quest*, give a thought to the game that started it all. ★

HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE LANDMARK GAMES THAT WIZARDRY INFLUENCED



DRAGON QUEST

■ Launched in 1986, *Dragon Quest* borrows from both *Ultima* and *Wizardry*: the latter's influence can be particularly seen in the random, first-person battles. Yuji Horii has said the idea of levelling up through combat was inspired directly by *Wizardry*.



REMAKING WIZARDRY

HOW DIGITAL ECLIPSE SPRUCED UP THE 1981 ORIGINAL.

■ Justin Bailey, who until recently was head of publishing at Digital Eclipse, explains that the journey to remaking *Wizardry* for modern platforms began with Brian Fargo, co-creator of *The Bard's Tale*. Brian was able to introduce him to several key players in the *Wizardry* story, such as the Sirotek brothers, and later on Justin met Robert Woodhead at the Apple II celebration event KansasFest. Robert and Justin then travelled to Japan to meet Jun Suemi, who created the box art for the Japanese version of *Wizardry*, as well as Benny Matsuyama, who wrote several *Wizardry* novels ("He's like Mr *Wizardry* there," Justin says). Both were brought on board for the remake project, with Jun supplying new key art and Benny writing the in-game bestiary.

Digital Eclipse took the original PASCAL code for *Wizardry* and ported it into C++ and Unreal Engine, so although the remake looks considerably more fancy than the 1981 game, it's all based on the same source code. You can even have the Apple II version running simultaneously in the bottom-right corner of the screen. The graphics may have had a considerable overhaul, but Justin says Digital Eclipse tried to keep the gameplay as close to the original as possible: right down to the bugs. "Some of those bugs have become famous, and that was part of the experience,"

he says, giving the example of how Frost Giants grant huge amounts of EXP.

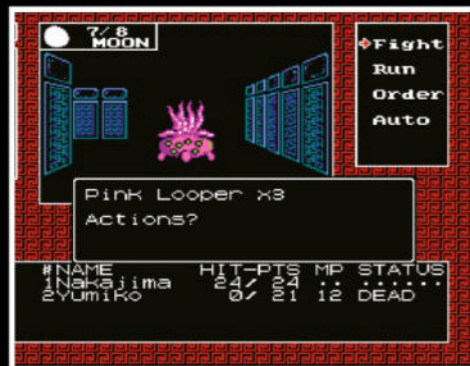
But in addition to playing the old-school original game, there's an option to play a version where some of the rough edges have been smoothed over with modern quality-of-life improvements. Justin gives an example: in the original, if an attack was cued up against a monster that had died from a previous party member's attack, that attack would be wasted, but in the remake, that attack can now be directed towards another monster. "We wanted to update it to what current gamers would expect," he says, "so it can be exposed to a new audience."

One thing that has remained the same, however, is the game's legendary difficulty. "*Demon's Souls* was actually inspired by *Wizardry* and how hard it was, so we definitely wanted to keep that level of difficulty," Justin says. However, there are plenty of additional options to make it slightly less punishing than the old-school Apple II game. "Particular attention was paid towards making it so people could change their experience to be a little easier," Justin admits. "So when you start off in the game, it has a nice balance of old-school and new-school options. And then you can go in and make it absolutely as punishing as it was originally by taking some of those off."



FINAL FANTASY

■ The designers of *Final Fantasy* were all big fans of *Ultima* and *Wizardry*. Akitoshi Kawazu was inspired by *Wizardry* for the party-based battle system, and the way different spell names have a systematic root (Fire/Fira/Firaga, etc) harks back to *Wizardry*, too.



DIGITAL DEVIL STORY: MEGAMI TENSEI

■ The first game in the *Megami Tensei* series follows the first-person, grid-based mechanics of *Wizardry* extremely closely. In fact, it was deemed to be too close to *Wizardry* during development, so the demon summoning system was added to make it more original.

SCORE 014590 ENERGY

Mr Robot And His Robot Factory

I HEARD RAMI MALEK WOULD BE HERE

» RETROREVIVAL



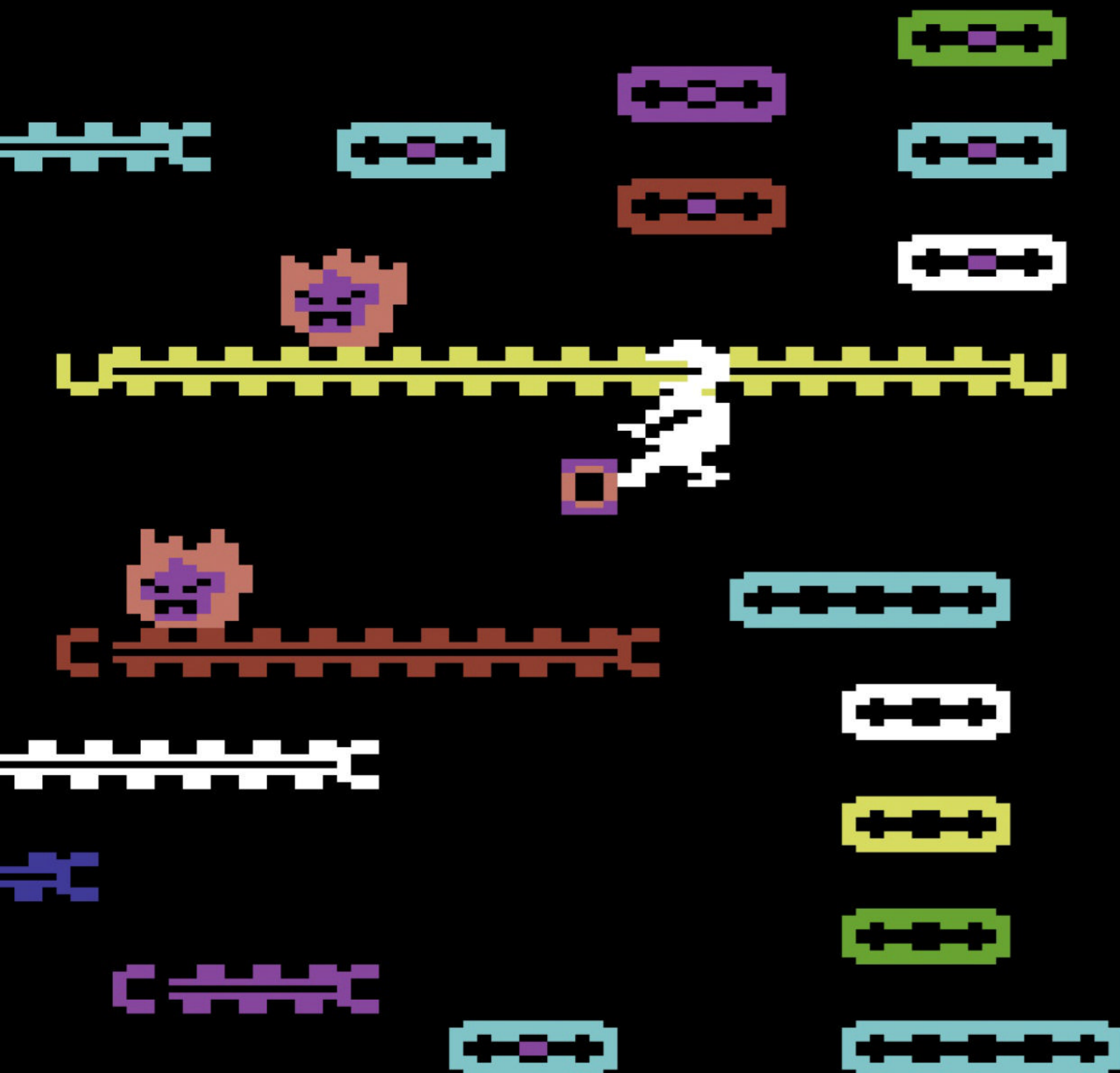
» COMMODORE 64 » 1984 » RON ROSEN
I really have a fondness for single-screen platformers, and since the style was at its peak in the Eighties, it's almost inevitable that I'll end up playing one whenever I break out

an 8-bit computer. I think part of it is just because I like to put myself in the shoes of the game designer when I play them. One of my favourite quotes is from the veteran *Magic: The Gathering* head designer Mark Rosewater, "Restrictions breed creativity." I wonder how I would tackle the task of creating interesting and varied challenges within the limitations of a single screen?

When it comes to *Mr Robot And His Robot Factory*, I don't need to wonder. The game comes with a fully featured level construction kit as standard, so I can have just as much fun tinkering around with my own designs as I do playing the ones that come as standard. The only problem I have is the common one I have with any level construction kit that predates the concept of easy online sharing – inevitably, my own designs don't challenge me and I don't really have anybody local that would tolerate my experiments in game-design torment. Maybe I need to set up a way to share these kinds of custom creations?

Of course, it's well worth playing even if you have no interest in designing your own stages. The game plays similarly to the likes of *Miner 2049er*, as you need to walk across the whole floor area to complete a stage, while dodging aggressive flames – or extinguishing them by collecting a Heat Shield and running into them. It's got some quirks that are common to early platform games, like deaths from falling too far and allowing you to run through obstacles that feel like they should be solid, but it's well worth trying out if you've got a Commodore 64 – or indeed an Atari 8-bit computer or Apple II. *

Y 85 SCREEN 8 MEN 01



A TRIBUTE TO team17®

FORMED AFTER A MERGER BETWEEN SWEDISH DEVELOPER TEAM 7 AND UK PUBLISHER 17-BIT SOFTWARE, TEAM17 HELPED DEFINE AMIGA GAMING WITH ALIEN BREED, SUPERFROG AND WORMS. FOUNDER ANDREAS TADIĆ REVIEWS THE FIRM'S GREATEST AMIGA RELEASES

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



ANDREAS TADIĆ

A member of the Swedish Amiga demoscene, Andreas first worked on *Miami Chase* for Codemasters as part of Team 7. He then became the lead coder for Team17, where his Amiga hits included *Project-X*, *Alien Breed* and *Superfrog*. He's now the senior software engineer at Unity Technologies in Stockholm.



The product of a union between the British shareware publisher

17-Bit Software and the Swedish developer Team 7, Team17 built on the successes of the two Amiga-focussed groups.

The studio graced the system in 1991 with its slick one-on-one brawler *Full Contact*, and in the same year it won plaudits for its top-down Amiga shooter *Alien Breed*, which received a chart-topping special edition the next year. 1992 also saw Team17 channel *R-Type* on Commodore's computer with its scrolling shoot-'em-up *Project-X*, and pay homage to *Strider* on the 16-bit system with its frenetic action title *Assassin*.

The firm attracted yet more praise in the following year, both for its *Sonic/Mario* mash-up *Superfrog* and the intense sequel *Alien Breed II*, each of which originated on the Amiga. In 1994, the firm ventured beyond in-house projects by re-releasing Kaiko's Amiga exclusive shooter *Apidya* and publishing Bloodhouse's Amiga *Asteroids* homage *Super Stardust*.

Despite the popularity of these two releases, Team17's humorous 1995 strategy title *Worms* entirely eclipsed its earlier games and won the hearts of Amiga gamers. During that same year, *Alien Breed 3D* wowed that same scene when it reimagined the original blaster as a first-person shooter. By 1996, the Amiga's star was fading fast, but Team17 still gave it a proper send off with its technically impressive follow-up, *Alien Breed 3D 2*.

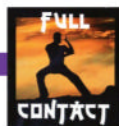
In the intervening years, the studio has favoured other platforms, but its releases for them have included sequels to Amiga originals such as *Alien Breed*, *Superfrog* and of course *Worms*. *



FULL CONTACT

AMIGA • 1991

■ As fast and slick as an Eighties arcade brawler with cool moves and bonus rounds culled from Eighties computer fighting games, *Full Contact* impresses with fluid animation and sumptuous backdrops. A rotoscoped title screen and an eclectic field of ever more challenging opponents help to elevate Team17's debut even further.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

“*Full Contact* was influenced by good old fighting games on the Commodore 64, like *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and *International Karate*. I loved those, and so did my artist Rico Holmes. In comparison with what we did later it wasn't all that complicated. I took graphics from our first game *Miami Chase* and some code, but we could take a lot of the performance crippling stuff out because it wasn't vertically scrolling.”

PROJECT-X

AMIGA • 1992

■ Famous for its unforgiving challenge, *Project-X* rewards you with power-ups for destroying entire waves of enemies. If you fail to do this for long then coping with subsequent waves becomes tricky, and if you lose a life you lose power-ups, meaning there's precious little room for error.

ANDREAS' MEMORIES

“If you looked at other games, their enemy attack patterns were pretty mathematical. They tended to follow sine waves or circles. We wanted to move away from that, and try to make something a little bit different. The attacks were meant to be a bit of a surprise, and apparently they were! Regarding the fast-scrolling levels, I think we just wanted bonus levels, and that was what they were. They were all about collecting bonuses and coming out better prepared for the next level.”

TOP TACTICS

TIPS FOR TACKLING THE TOUGH SHOOTER

GREAT GUNS

■ The forward-facing guns in *Project-X* can be fairly rapidly enhanced by picking up upgrades, which makes them invaluable given the game's steep difficulty curve.

WEAPONS OF CHOICE

■ *Project-X*'s collectable armaments include front-fitted Plasma, Magma and Lazer upgrades plus Sideshots, homing missiles and screen-clearing blasts.

USEFUL PICK-UPS

■ In order to make your mission slightly less challenging, *Project-X* provides you with power-ups to speed up your craft and temporarily give it invulnerability.

HELPING HAND

■ To Team17's credit, the early stages of *Project-X* cut you a little slack, in that if you lose all your lives on them you can resume from the level you died on.

MAJOR STRATEGIES

■ The bosses in *Project-X* take many hits to put down but they're slow and predictable, so avoid their occasional attacks and otherwise pepper them with ammo.



ALIEN BREED

AMIGA • 1991

■ The Amiga excels at top-down shooters, and Team17's alien action title is one of the best. Ammo and health are collected or bought at terminals, while keys have to be used intelligently to avoid getting locked out of certain areas.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

“The limited ammo and collectable credits were to do with playability, because you had to run around and look for ammo to progress. There were certainly discussions about just throwing it all out there, but I think what we did helped the pace of the game. It was still relatively generous with ammo, but you *could* run out and you had to keep that in mind.”





ASSASSIN

AMIGA • 1992

■ Apart from its hero's stylings and his acrobatic abilities, *Assassin* has little in common with Capcom's coin-op *Strider*, despite frequent comparisons between the two games. The titular assassin is able to climb vertical surfaces, and sometimes finds cause to traverse high-up vertical extrusions hand-over-hand, but these talents aside he lacks the swathe of abilities possessed by *Strider* Hiryu. In respect of *Assassin*'s level designs and layouts, the game shares more with *Turrican* than Capcom's arcade game, although with concessions made to accommodate its hero's aforementioned climbing abilities. The similarities with *Turrican* stop there, however, as *Assassin*'s protagonist has a boomerang for a weapon until he upgrades it, and even then the Team17 release never becomes a shooter. Instead, *Assassin* is its own game, one where far better armed opponents have to be stealthily dispatched and fiendish platforming challenges have to be tackled.



CARDIAXX

AMIGA • 1993

■ Originally debuting in 1991, this stylish re-release from Team17 is far from lacking substance. *Cardiaxx* is best described as a hybrid of *Defender* and *R-Type*, in that you pilot your ship left and right through confined stages. Waves of enemies have to be taken out, asteroid showers have to be navigated through or picked off, and bosses have to be taken care of. A unique mechanic sees a disembodied voice instructing you to head left or right to your upcoming challenge, and until it's completed you can't progress to the next. This is important to know, as there's a time limit to finish each level, and you can't do that without beating all of its tests of shooting skills and manoeuvrability. Each stage has a metallic or organic motif, and is followed by an outer-space battle.



F17 CHALLENGE

AMIGA • 1993

■ The first into-the-screen racer released by Team17, *F17 Challenge* follows the arcade approach to racing games rather than attempting to be a realistic sim. That's not to say that it doesn't reflect reality at all. The weather might always be sunny regardless of where you are in the world, but the tracks you race on have appropriate surroundings for the country that they're located in. If you hit another driver you spin out, meaning the classic coin-op move of using other vehicles to get around corners won't work. Your car accrues damage that can ultimately require a pit-stop, and in the game's base mode you accumulate points like in the real sport. These few concessions aside, *F17 Challenge* provides a fun arcade-like experience with just enough depth to ensure replay value.



FORMULA FUN THE 3D RACER'S TOP FEATURES

MARVELLOUS MODES

■ In its standard mode, you race a season and gain points in each race depending on where you finish. In the game's arcade mode, you need top three finishing positions to keep progressing.



CAR CHOICES

■ In each of *F17 Challenge*'s races you attempt to come first in a field of 22 cars, you have a choice of driving vehicles built by Ferrari, Williams, McLaren and Benetton.



DIFFERING DIFFICULTIES

■ There are three difficulty levels on offer, and some modes allow you to choose how many laps you race. The more you attempt the more chance you have of wrecking your car.



WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?

■ Mounting kerbs and colliding with trackside barriers or other cars incurs damage, and if you don't make a pit-stop when your damage meter nears 100% it can end your race.





SUPERFROG

AMIGA, CD32 • 1993

Although you dispatch foes by jumping on them like Mario and run along undulating routes at top speed like Sonic, *Superfrog* is otherwise a traditional platformer, where you complete each level by collecting a set number of coins.

ANDREAS' MEMORIES

Rico and I both loved *Sonic* because it was so fast and so slick, and we thought that because we had these scrolling routines that I could check how far I could stretch them. So I optimised them by using the CPU together with the blitter in weird and wonderful ways, and we put something together with fast scrolling. We didn't want to do anything that was even slightly similar to *Sonic*, or Sega would have screamed like all hell! But we also played *Super Mario*, and thought that was super playable, so we tried to reach for something in-between."

SUPERB SETTINGS THE ECLECTIC ENVIRONMENTS OF TEAM17'S POLISHED PLATFORMER

FOREST

The most *Sonic*-like of *Superfrog*'s stages has you sprinting along hills and valleys, while avoiding deadly creatures and platforming in the branches of trees.



WINTER

Expect slippery ice surfaces and aggressive penguins when you tackle the winter level in *Superfrog*. Other dangers include falling blocks of ice and icebergs.



CASTLE

The castle level in *Superfrog* is defined by traps and hazards, like burning oil, spiked metal balls on chains and platforms that appear and disappear in turn.



CIRCUS

Superfrog's circus level has all the fun of a deadly fair! You get shot at by gloved hands, attacked by killer goldfish and sucked through a network of pipes.



BODY BLOWS

AMIGA • 1993

Team17's answer to *Street Fighter II* cleverly adapts the six-button coin-op's controls to work with a one-button joystick. The colourful cast in *Body Blows* includes a street punk, a ninja, a wrestler, a boxer and a polite businessman named Mike!



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

I only supported the coder for *Body Blows*. That was actually our first proper game that wasn't done by me and Rico. Danny Burke came in with the idea, and then I helped out somewhat with the code. It was his first game, and it seemed to go down pretty well. I mean, it was all that you could do with a one-button joystick. It was typical of Martyn getting involved, in terms of how we could make that work. I don't know where having a fighter who was a businessman called Mike came from, but the fact was that the businessman who started Team17 was Mick Robinson. So Mick/Mike, I don't know. That's just a theory, I have no idea really."



QWAK

AMIGA • 1993

Jamie Woodhouse's *Qwak* is a sequel to his earlier BBC Micro title of the same name, although the Team17 Amiga release has many more features. The follow-up's single-screen levels require you to collect all their gold keys in order to unlock an exit to the next stage. You do this against the clock, but once the timer hits zero you can continue collecting, albeit with the additional threat of deadly spikes falling from the top of the screen. Other pick-ups include fruit and gems that contribute to your score, and silver keys that unlock gates that once unlocked give you access to power-ups. On each stage, *Qwak* sets all manner of strange creatures against you, which you can take out by chucking eggs at them. After clearing each block of themed levels, there are groups of larger foes to take down that act as the game's bosses.





ALIEN BREED II: THE HORROR CONTINUES

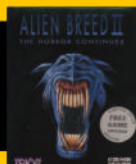
AMIGA • 1993

■ Rather than sneaking around picking off aliens like in the original, *Alien Breed II* has you engaging in intense firefights, some of which involve armed aliens. Another innovation is that you can play as one of four characters with different equipment.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

We thought we were done with *Alien Breed*, and we wanted to do *Superfrog* as something different, but then after that we really wanted to go back and do *Alien Breed II*. *Alien Breed* as a brand was totally inspired by the film *Alien*. Rico and I were big fans. We also loved *Gauntlet*, so using that as a foundation for making a game of the film *Alien* was just, 'Yeah!' We did a lot of new stuff with *Alien Breed II*, and that took a lot of coding. I learned a lot by doing *Superfrog*, and *Alien Breed II* was pretty much built on top of its code rather than on the original *Alien Breed* code, because technically it had advanced so much further that it made sense. It meant that we could have more objects on the screen and more flashy sprites."



AWESOME ATTRIBUTES

KEY ASPECTS OF THE TOP-DOWN ALIEN SEQUEL

INTERESTING INFLUENCES

■ Although *Alien Breed II* mirrors the frenetic action in *Aliens*, the inspiration for this actually came from it being technically possible.

COOL COLLECTIBLES

■ The *Alien Breed* follow-up takes pick-ups to a new level, in that large dumps of health and ammo are scattered around its stages.

CHARACTER STUDY

■ The heroes of *Alien Breed II* each start the game with useful items, including machine guns, Triple Lasers, scanners, keys and credits.

AMAZING ARMAMENTS

■ The weapons in Team17's sequel have three levels of destructiveness. Homing missiles, flame throwers and grenades are good options.

WORTHY OPPONENTS

■ Not only does *Alien Breed II* have more aliens than the original, but its foes hide from you, plan surprise attacks and can even use guns against you.



OVERDRIVE

AMIGA • 1993

■ One look at *Overdrive* tells you that it takes its lead from *Micro Machines*, but given how much fun the top-down racer is that's no bad thing. As with the Codemasters hit, *Overdrive* features colourful characters driving different specs of vehicles, from 4x4s and beach buggies to supercars and F1 cars. There's no toy car element or household and garden environments; instead you race around cities, winter courses, dirt tracks and Grand Prix circuits. There's an emphasis on collecting power-ups as you drive around, and bagging these can make the difference between getting first or second place. As well as non-skid tyres, extra fuel, turbos and better steering, you can pick up a Superman symbol that stops you using fuel at all as you race around. There are also dollar signs to collect, which give you funds to bolster your winnings in each race. You need this money to pay for the entry fees for subsequent events, so scooping up dollars is a winning strategy. Last but not least, the surfaces you race on have an effect on your vehicle's performance



APIDYA

AMIGA • 1994

■ Swap out *Apidya*'s wildlife-themed hero, enemies and environments for spaceships, aliens and space, and it becomes obvious that Team17's re-release of the 1992 shooter owes a debt to the classic coin-op *Gradius*. In terms of its visual design, however, the side-scrolling shooter is arguably unique. Its hero is a wasp on a mission that takes it through the likes of a garden, a pond and a sewer. Power-ups become available when you dispatch entire waves of foes.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

The art style and characters in *Apidya* were completely different from *Project-X*. We went for something more arcadey; we obviously got our ideas from *R-Type*. I played *Apidya* to try out a few things, but I can't really compare it to *Project-X* because I didn't play it enough. It was one of what became many external products that we didn't do in-house. Martyn was extending Team17's range of published games. So rather than try to do everything in-house, and live like that, we could buy games reasonably cheaply. It went OK, I think. We also published *F17 Challenge*, and a few other games from external developers."



SUPER STARDUST

AMIGA, CD32 • 1994

■ To understand what *Super Stardust* is, just imagine Atari's *Asteroids* with rocks requiring more or less shots to destroy depending on their colour, waves of alien ships and end-of-section bosses. The Team17 release also boasts impressive 3D stages.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

I did play *Super Stardust* quite a bit. I liked it because it was technically really impressive. It was a Finnish team that did that, and we got on really well with them. I think the collaboration went great. I played it when it came out, and I'd played it a few times before then, because Martyn wanted to know what I thought about it. I liked it, although I honestly haven't got that much in-depth memory of it. It certainly made a name for itself, you have to say. The group that made it did some really nice stuff. I had made a few games by that time, but as a coder I was wondering how they did some things. Then it would dawn on me what they had done."

POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

HOW THE ASTEROIDS HOMAGE DIFFERENTIATES ITSELF

BEAUTIFUL BACKDROPS

■ The ray-tracing techniques used to render *Super Stardust's* backgrounds gives the game stunning vistas depicting alien worlds, epic star bases and vast cities floating in space.



MIGHTY MAYORS

■ In *Super Stardust*, the bosses are giant metal alien constructs with heavy artillery and dense armour. They home in on your position then pause, allowing you to get some shots in.



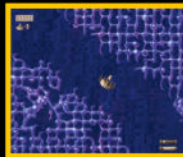
PERFECT PICK-UPS

■ In order to get access to better firearms you first have to collect tokens. Once secured, you can activate a Three-Way Shot, a Bouncer Shot, Plasma, Flamer, Burster or traditional missiles.



SENSATIONAL SUBGAMES

■ Aside from periodic into-the-screen 3D warp sections, there are levels that channel gravity games like *Thrust*, where you collect power-ups while trying not to destroy your ship.



ALIEN BREED: TOWER ASSAULT

AMIGA, CD32 • 1994

■ Rather than reinvent the wheel, *Alien Breed: Tower Assault* delivers more of the same top-down alien blasting that made the earlier games in the series so popular. That's not to say that it doesn't have anything new to offer, of course, and it also has refinements of the series formula that make it a better game than any of its predecessors. In terms of fresh mechanics, *Tower Assault* introduces a Retreat mechanic, where you can switch to shooting your weapon in the direction that you're running away from. *Tower Assault* also has a novel level structure, in so much as there are multiple exits to other areas from each stage, meaning each playthrough of the game will most likely be very different. The most effective tweak to the *Alien Breed* template comes with *Tower Assault's* difficulty level, which is somewhere between the first two games. Its immersive sound effects are equally noteworthy.



ARCADE POOL

AMIGA, CD32 • 1994

■ For those that have never played pool, the rules are simple: pot all of the balls of your colour and then pot the 8-ball before your opponent does. With Team17's *Arcade Pool*, as with the real thing, the attraction lies in working out the angle and strength to hit the cue ball so that it has a fair chance of potting the ball you want it to while not benefitting your rival if it should fail to do so. In this respect, *Arcade Pool* may not mirror real-world physics 100%, but more importantly it allows a complete novice to make progress without too much practice. That said, if you're a pool whizz then the game satisfactorily simulates the outcome of a shot in a real game of pool. Besides AI players of variable skill and a two-player mode, there are challenges to clear the table without failing to pot more than three times and to clear the table in the quickest time possible.





WORMS

AMIGA, CD32 • 1995

■ Andy Davidson's turn-based strategy hit went on to guarantee Team17's future thanks to its compelling gameplay and silly premise. Taking control of a team of four worms, your mission is to use over-the-top weapons to destroy a quartet of enemies.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

I don't think there was that much luck to *Worms*' design; it was all very well thought out. Where we were lucky was with the timing, in that at the time people who would play those kinds of games had an Amiga. People at that time also liked games with a sense of humour, and *Worms* was all humour. Then there was the fact that it worked so well with two or more players. The whole idea was so beautifully simple, and games with that simplicity are the ones that are groundbreaking. The first version we ever saw was like *Battleships* but with worms! So we thought we had to do something with that."

TOOLS OF WAR THE OVER-THE-TOP WEAPONS ON OFFER IN WORMS

BAZOOKA

■ This popular armament packs a heck of a punch, but you have to consider gravity and the speed and direction that the wind is blowing.

GRENADE

■ These cause 50 points of damage like a bazooka and aren't affected by wind, but can miss their mark due to bouncing around the floor.

FIRE PUNCH

■ A versatile option that lets you punch opponents into water, cut through landscapes to reach rivals and move weapon crates.

DYNAMITE

■ Capable of inflicting major damage to enemies, dynamite has to be run away from once lit in order to escape its blast area!

AIRSTRIKE

■ Devastating if skillfully employed, an airstrike is the last word in worm annihilation and can eradicate an entire squadron.



ALIEN BREED 3D

AMIGA, CD32 • 1995

■ Just coaxing a FPS out of the Amiga is praiseworthy enough, but *Alien Breed 3D* also plays at least as well as *Doom*. It also respects the *Alien Breed* titles that it emulates with its alien and robotic foes, resource management and immersive atmosphere.



ANDREAS' MEMORIES

When *Alien Breed 3D* came out I was only really playing arcade games or games that moved at 50Hz, but it was a pretty new concept. I was never into *Doom* or anything like that in the beginning. It was only later on when the graphics got better and you actually got 50Hz that those types of game turned into something that was really responsive. Then they became interesting. They weren't really there around the time of *Alien Breed 3D*, but I have to say that it took a technical genius to pull off what Andy Clitheroe did with it. I couldn't be less than honoured that he made it. It was pretty cool."



ATR: ALL TERRAIN RACING

AMIGA • 1995

■ Although considered a spiritual successor to *Overdrive*, *ATR: All Terrain Racing* was actually developed in-house by Team17, unlike *Overdrive*, which was the work of Psionic Systems. What the two games do have in common is that both are top-down racers in the style of *Micro Machines*, but *ATR* differentiates itself in a number of ways. You earn money by doing well in races, just like in *Overdrive*, but instead of spending this on entry fees for subsequent races you invest in upgrades for your vehicle. *ATR* also has temporary power-ups that you pick-up during races, and in its two-player Battle mode these can include mines and missiles, providing you enable them pre-game. Regardless of if weapons are made available or not in this mode, you score points for leaving your sole opponent so far behind you that they disappear off the screen, with the winner being the competitor who has the most points at the end of a race. There's no combat in *ATR*'s solo offering, with its challenge instead being to finish in a certain position or higher in order to proceed to the next race.





KINGPIN: ARCADE SPORTS BOWLING

AMIGA, CD32 • 1995

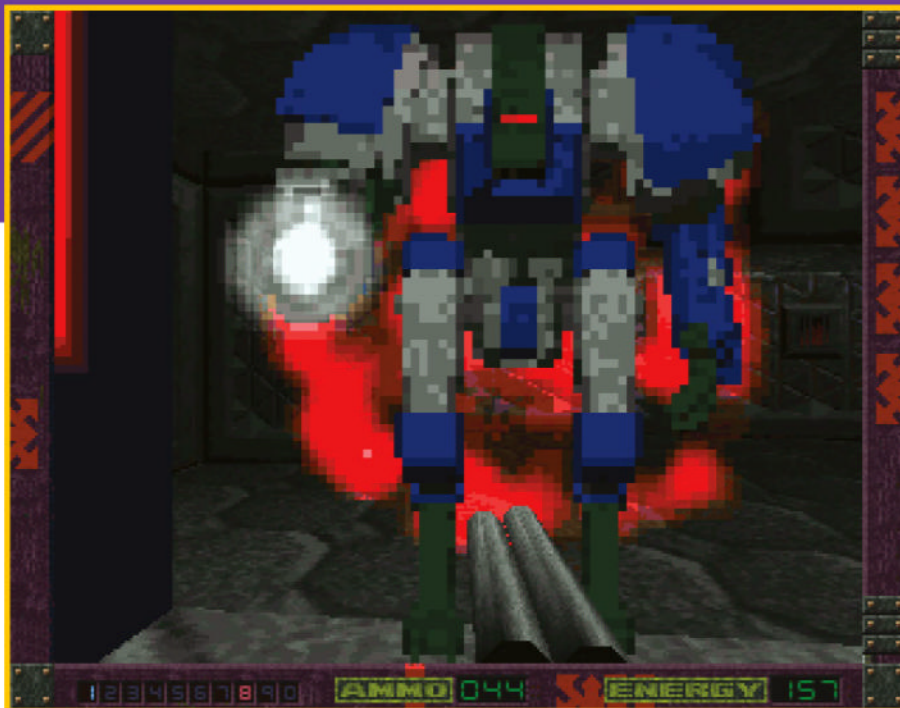
■ For anyone with a passing interest in ten-pin bowling, *Kingpin: Arcade Sports Bowling* is about as good as an Amiga adaptation of the sport could reasonably be. Its gameplay, especially in multiplayer mode, is also enough of a draw to attract those who would do anything to avoid visiting a bowling alley in real life. For the uninitiated, knocking down all the pins on your first attempt is called a strike, and knocking them all down across two attempts is called a spare, with strikes scoring you more points than spares. In *Kingpin*, you choose the weight of ball you want to bowl, position your virtual bowler, decide on the strength of their shot and then specify where they should aim the ball by stopping a gauge that speeds from left to right at just the right moment. The skill required by aiming the ball is really where the crux of *Kingpin*'s appeal lies, much like it is in real-life bowling.



THE SPERIS LEGACY

AMIGA, CD32 • 1996

■ Due credit should go to Binary Emotions for developing *The Speris Legacy* and to Team17 for publishing it, as prior to its release a *Zelda*-type game for the Amiga hadn't been attempted. Given that the Amiga 1200 and CD32 only fell short of the capabilities of the SNES in a few areas, this seems to have been an oversight, so it's only fair that Amiga gamers got to experience something akin to Link's adventures for themselves. In *Speris*, the journey is at least as important as the destination. Speaking to friendly NPCs gives you clues about what to do next and how to do it, whereas interactions with hostile NPCs requires combat. You can claim gems from fallen foes if you beat them, and you can use these to buy weapons and other useful items in shops. How you use these useful items is for you to work out, and the same applies to how you interact with environmental features, but this makes the moments where you make progress all the more sweet.



ALIEN BREED 3D 2: THE KILLING GROUNDS

AMIGA, CD32 • 1996

■ Providing you have a powerful enough Amiga, *Alien Breed 3D 2: The Killing Grounds* knocks the spots off its predecessor. The sequel has far higher-resolution graphics with lighting effects that give it an atmosphere that could never have been achieved within the technical restraints of the original. The immersion created by *The Killing Grounds*' visuals is only amplified by the haunting sounds of the aliens and mechanoids that prowl its dimly lit labyrinthine levels. The follow-up's ambient pulse of a soundtrack reinforces the primal fear generated by its wailing monsters, and of course with it being a first-person shooter you have ample means to send them to their graves. Everything from shotguns to rocket launchers are made available to you, and unlike some FPS titles where you exclusively use your favourite armament, in *Killing Grounds* you have to select the most suitable weapon for the task at hand. The rocket launcher, for example, causes devastation whenever in use, but its sheer size means that it all but blocks your view. So it's really only a sensible option for taking out lone bosses, and this clever approach to weapon design adds strategy to the game's offering.



VARIANTS AND OBSCURE RELEASES

TEAM17'S SPECIAL EDITIONS AND MORE

■ The new levels in *Alien Breed: Special Edition 92* secured it 33 weeks in the charts, whereas the chopper shooter *Apache* came free with major Team17 releases. *Body Blows Galactic* is *Body Blows* with some new fighters and locations; *Ultimate Body Blows* is a compilation of the aforementioned brawlers. *Assassin: Special Edition* swaps the hero's boomerang for a laser, *Arcade Snooker* is *Arcade Pool* with different rules and balls, and *Worms: The Director's Cut* has new weapons and a level editor. Finally, the Amiga version of Team17's PC adventure *Nightlong: Union City Conspiracy* was ported and published by third parties.



MAGAZINE CRAFT

PAUL DAVIES

In the first of a brand-new series, we interview the game journalists behind the most iconic gaming magazines of the past. We kick off by speaking to Paul Davies about his time as editor of CVG. We discuss the videogames that hooked him growing up, his time in the industry, and how he became an unlikely hero in revamping the iconic multiformat mag

Words by Stuart Hunt

THEN

After falling in love with gaming in the arcades and on home micros, Paul moved into videogame journalism. He started off working for EMAP, and the first magazine he ever wrote for was the acclaimed *Mean Machines*. He quickly graduated to become editor of *CVG*.



What was the first videogame you remember playing, Paul?

I remember my friend showing me *Space Invaders* in the lobby area of my local Tesco. I would have been around nine or ten years old at the time. I didn't know about coin-ops, so remember peering into it and not knowing what to expect. That was the first game I saw that stood out. The way it looked, sounded, everything – not to mention the strangeness of it being in Tesco.

What home computers did you experience while you were growing up?

My mate had a Spectrum and an Atari VCS, so I played on those. But it was when the BBC Micro came out that me and my brother came up with a cunning plan to get one between us – we basically said we needed it for school because it had BASIC. We'd play stuff like *Colossal Adventure*, *Twin Kingdom Valley*, *Frak!* and *Blogger*, which was this *Manic Miner*-style platformer.

Did any other games leave their mark on you at an early age?

Pac-Man was the first game that I thought was just awesome – with its cabinet artwork and funky look. I remember buying a paperback guide to get a high score on it. I learnt the names of the ghosts and even did a school talk on it. I even drew diagrams on the blackboard and stuff. I was that enthusiastic about *Pac-Man* that I thought everyone needed to know about it.

Sounds like your first bit of games reporting. Moving onto that topic, how did you get into writing?

I was never that academic, I was into drawing

and art – that was my thing. The writing came later. In my early 20s I read quite a lot of fantasy and science-fiction books. I read all the *Discworld* stuff, and a series by Stephen Lawhead which was all based on Arthurian legend. In terms of writing, I worked as a care worker for nearly three years, and you had to write diaries for the people you were spending time with. And these needed to be particular to the person for it to be helpful. I used to invest quite a bit of time in that. I wanted it to be reflective of them and what was going on around them.

So how did that lead to a career in videogame journalism?

In the early Nineties I was buying *Mean Machines*, *ZERO* and *CVG*, and aspired to be on them. I wrote into *Mean Machines* when they were looking for a staff writer and this was around 1992. I didn't get the job but did get a call later that year from Julian Rignall. He invited me back to discuss something they were planning – splitting up *Mean Machines* into *Nintendo Magazine System* and *Mean Machines Sega*.

How was the editorial team structured?

They had me, Rob Bright, Eddie Lawrence (Rad Automatic), Gus Swan and Tom Guise as a sort of pool of staff writers to work across different gaming magazines. The first magazine I ever wrote for was the last issue of *Mean Machines*, before the change. Tom was mostly *MegaTech*, and me, Gus and Rob Bright would write things for *Mean Machines* and *Nintendo Magazine System*, and sometimes a bit for *MegaTech*. Weirdly, we could charge extra freelance money for writing for *MegaTech*. I was earning £7,500 per year and living off packets of crisps and Heinz Big Soup.

NOW

Paul has worked in a number of different roles since first leaving videogame mags, including a spell at Criterion and working as a freelancer on *Retro Gamer*. He's consulted on projects like *Life Is Strange* and has most recently been working on art books for Disney.



» The final issue of *Mean Machines* before it went full Sega. Also, the first magazine that Paul ever wrote for.



FAVOURITE GAMING MAG

"Super Play was a great magazine. Jason Brookes was a great guy and a real legend, and Wil Overton. I do generally think **Retro Gamer** – which seems to me the last authentic continuation of everything we all did in the Nineties. If I had to pick one though it would be Nineties' **Edge** – that was a monster that put the pressure on to raise standards."



What led to you working full time on Nintendo Magazine System?

Well, they had to offer us career progression and with that a bit more money, so I became the software editor, which just meant phoning around all the publishers, and a handful of import shops, to get the games in. Between me and Gary Harrod, we were trusted to get the cool stuff in.

How was the team structured?

In terms of *Nintendo Magazine System*, it was official so there was a level of professionalism that we had to adhere to, which at every opportunity we would veer away from to give an identity to the magazine. Using his contacts, Julian would make sure we had all the exclusives and, naturally, all the official Nintendo stuff. Gary and I would be the third-party guys – dealing with the likes of Konami, Hudson Soft, Psygnosis, and Sony for games like *Skyblazer* and *Hook*.

Can you tell us what was happening with CVG at this point?

“We were more Dynamite Headdy than James Pond. We would never have done a FIFA cover”

PAUL DAVIES

It was kind of struggling a bit. *Edge* came out and became the prestige multiformat title. CVG didn't really know what it wanted to be. They wanted to be taken seriously but still have that quirky sense of humour. They were still talking about the Amiga and the Atari ST. It was still a

computer-games mag and less about consoles.

What happened next?

Tom Guise and I wanted to do our own thing at EMAP. We discussed launching a magazine about games and gaming culture, which would have had a similar personality to CVG, but cover broader things like music. Well, it just so happened that Mark Patterson felt that he had done enough at CVG and decided to leave. That meant they needed someone to be the editor. I joined EMAP in 1992 and three years later I was the editor of CVG. But nobody wanted to do it – I feel I need to say that.

Why was that you think?

The strategy meetings we had, and the discussions around the magazine, were often ▶

I REMEMBER WHEN

STOP PRESS... SONIC'S SCRAPPING!

"We saw *Sonic The Fighters* in *Famitsu* and managed to convince our publisher that we had to stop the press, literally, as everyone would flip. We had these stickers made to stick on the cover to advertise that we had one page at the back of the magazine about it. It was crazy really."

I REMEMBER WHEN

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

"Ed Lomas, when we were doing the fighting games (I think it was *Fighting Vipers* or maybe *Virtua Fighter 2*, it was one of those), he did the *CVG* guide for it and was measuring the amount of damage from each attack with a length of string and a ruler."



» FREEPLAY was an extra section in *CVG* for community stuff, tips and readers' drawings.



» The team looked like kids on Christmas after unwrapping a Japanese N64 with games.

BEST PRESS TRIP

PAUL RECALLS EXPLORING JAPAN

At the height of PlayStation, around the time of *Tekken 3*, *Final Fantasy VIII* and *Omega Boost*, Sony would invite a small group of European journalists to Tokyo Game Show and a week-long publisher tour. This included visits to Namco, Square Enix, Team Ninja and Sony HQ among others. "It was relentless during the day: back-to-back round table interviews with the world's most famous development teams," remembers Paul. "We did also have time to explore the city, however, which meant visits to the major arcades and the Akihabara shopping district, hunting rarities among the new releases. I learned so much and made some lifelong friendships."



► about whether it was still needed because we had everything covered with the other magazines. But I thought gosh, it would be so good to head up this one, which had been around for donkey's years, and make it important again.

How did you and Tom begin putting the *CVG* team together?

So originally it was me, Tom Guise and Tom Cox – who was the art editor of *Sega Magazine*. I can't be proud of how any of it came together because we basically just stole Tom and this guy who was hired straight out of college called Jaime Smith. It was literally us walking onto the magazine floor and saying to Jaime with his tea and toast, "Why don't you come and work with us on *CVG* – it's really good." That was it.

When did Ed Lomas and Alex Huhtala join the team?

Ed was someone we purposely went after. He would write into *MegaTech* with these incredible things – like he'd break the password codes for *Road Rash*. He'd figure it out, how it worked, and unlock all the levels. And he'd accompany it with an entertaining letter with pictures and stuff. We advertised for another staff writer and hired Alex Huhtala. He had a

“They were good people, exceptional people who wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else at that time”
PAUL DAVIES

way of saying things, still does, that could articulate the core of what the thing was that made it appealing. We also nicked Steve Key, who was doing work experience on *Mean Machines* Sega and a PlayStation mag.

So what was your plan to revamp *CVG*?

The console focus was number one. And more on the stuff coming out of Nintendo and Sega and the Japanese publishers, as opposed to the UK. It was things we loved about *EGM* and a hardcore gaming magazine called *Diehard GameFan*. So that authentic voice – knowledgeable, chatty.

How did the Japanese gaming mags influence the new *CVG* style?

Before the arrival of a new game, they would have lengthy, three or four DPS sections, on it. We emulated that. A good example of this would be a game like *Fighting Vipers*. We'd cover it as an arcade game first, and Gary Harrod would call on his brother Warren (who was our Japanese correspondent) to meet with Sega and get us all the artwork. Then, we'd get the Japanese import for the Sega Saturn, run that for a couple of months, and then Sega would finally release it in the



» For a time, Paul had a column in this very mag. As you can see, we often liked dressing him up.



» *CVG* certainly had some iconic covers. Even the Spice Girls' issue is memorable.

PROUDEST MOMENT

"Being part of *CVG* magazine and the website – they were part of the mix and weren't a background thing. People knew about them, liked them, and they continued to be worth something even when I wasn't there. But also, everyone I worked with, and I'm still in contact with most of them. It was like a family, they were all good people, and it was kind of like a springboard to go off and do something excellent with."



UK. We were just reflecting the consumer experience, but also serving those who were happy to wait for it to be in HMV.

CVG always had distinct covers – a cool piece of character or game art. Was that intentional?

My favourite cover was the relaunch issue where we had Mario and Sonic – that set the stall for what we wanted *CVG* to look like. You'll see that reflected in the cover we did for *Yoshi's Story*, where we had a graffiti artist do that. We also did a *Darkstalkers* cover with Felicia, the cat girl, and had all the coverlines written vertically in a pseudo-Japanese style. Those were some of my favourites.

We've got to ask; how did the Spice Girls and Louise Redknapp covers come about?

Famitsu would do features that were more targeted to a broader audience. The Japanese mags had a way of doing it that didn't feel forced – a cover would have Namie Amuro, who had her own game for the Saturn, and so it didn't feel out of place. We thought how do we present *PaRappa* to people, and thought Louise was something close to a Japanese pop idol. I genuinely thought the Spice Girls thing could be pretty good. It was kind of disappointing the assets that came through, and I think the game wasn't all that great either. It was an attempt to broaden the appeal. It wasn't a cynical money-grabbing thing. I would have liked this direction more if those two had worked as hoped.

What was the idea behind the yellow insert in the magazine?

What we liked about *Famitsu* was they had their nice glossy, colourful presentation pages and in the middle, more like on newsprint, a very thick section filled with more community-based stuff. I wanted something like that in *CVG* because we also wanted it to feel like a gaming community-type mag. That became the obvious place for charts, readers' letters, drawings and tips – which Ed ended up running.

There always seemed to be a big love for Sega in the magazine.

I remember Ed saying we talk too much about Sega Saturn – it's *Virtua Cop* not *Time Crisis*, it's *Daytona* not *Ridge Racer*. We didn't do enough on *Tekken 2* or *Mortal Kombat*. We were stupidly snobby, but we were learning to get better at talking about what the UK is excited about. We were more *Dynamite Headdy* than *James Pond*. We would never have done a *FIFA* cover. As big as *FIFA* is and was, it had to feel like a *CVG* thing, and colourful.

What would you say were some of the best and worst games you've covered in your career?

Super Mario 64. I don't think anything can really top that in terms of ground-breaking magic. It was a real significant moment in games where you were almost re-explaining what videogames could do. *Jet Set Radio* on the Dreamcast was also just a stunning-looking game of its era. In

Pac-Man was the first game I thought was just awesome – with its cabinet artwork and funky look

PAUL DAVIES

I REMEMBER WHEN

WON'T YOU PLAY ANOTHER DAY?

"When I was on *CVG*, that first year I joined, a couple of members of East 17 came in to do a fighting game challenge. They were quite big at the time after releasing their Christmas song – they were wearing those big coats as well."

BEST INTERVIEW

PAUL REVISITS HIS CHATS WITH A GAMING LEGEND

Paul has been fortunate to interview Shigeru Miyamoto a few times, and being a big Nintendo fan, it should come as no surprise that a chat with the Nintendo legend would rank as his most memorable. What is surprising though, is that it was a conversation that he wasn't initially looking forward to. "It was for an early piece on *Animal Crossing*, and I didn't know what to say about it as I didn't get it," recalls Paul. "I remember I asked Mr Miyamoto and Mr Tezuka, in essence, to describe what the game is about. They explained how every Nintendo game is about communication. They make them purposefully so that people talk about them as well as enjoy them. *Animal Crossing* was kind of like a pure sort of evolution of that idea – the whole thing is about communication and sharing. The fact that series went on to be so popular, with me doubting it and not seeing it, has always stuck with me. That was the one where I felt I had learnt a lot."

I REMEMBER WHEN

PIKACHU MAGIC AT SPACE WORLD

"I remember being at Space World 1997 and they debuted *Pikachu Genki Dechu*, which was the talking Pikachu you could talk to through a headset. It drew a massive crowd. That was a memorable moment for taking something out of a videogame and turning it into a nice bit of magic for kids."



» [Switch] Although it has gone on to become a huge series for Nintendo, Paul didn't initially get *Animal Crossing* when he first saw it.

► terms of worst, I'd say *Tom And Jerry* on the SNES. There was a time on the SNES when platform games were based on any old licence that people could find, and they were just flat-out awful. Big licence; terrible game.

What led to you being moved off the magazine to the website?

To grow the readership of the magazine their solution was to bring in people from within other divisions of EMAP, who had worked on *Max Power* and a bike magazine, to (and this is the best way I can describe it) make people who are not that interested in videogames buy a videogame magazine. That's when they redesigned it to have fewer but larger screenshots and much less written about the games.

What happened next?

I was kept on as editor-at-large for a time and got to go to all the shows and interview people at Tokyo Game Show and Nintendo Space World. From there, they needed someone to head up the website because Gus Swan, who was the editor, had left. That was exciting because we had Pat Garratt (who went on to do VG247 and was an absolute genius and driven), and this guy called Steve Fulljames who was the sort of designer/producer of it.

“I remember Ed saying we talk too much about Sega Saturn – it's Virtua Cop not Time Crisis, it's Daytona not Ridge Racer”
PAUL DAVIES

What was your approach to the website?

We knew people were getting access to the web through their Dreamcast and consoles, so we wanted the landing page to basically fit on a telly rather than a computer/PC. That's why we designed it to have an enormous search window at the top and a big graphic for our main story each day. We ran it like a newsroom. There was a bit of friction between us and the

magazine side. We were a daily, live thing so if something was announced then we'd want to talk about it straight away, and in detail.

You left and came back to CVG for a brief time, is that correct?

I left to work for Criterion as a creative design manager. Basically, to listen to the ideas that people had in the studio and consult on them. I managed to do that for a year before I realised that I wasn't very good at it and then came back to CVG, which was still at EMAP and Alex Simmons was the editor at the time. The website was still going – with Pat Garratt running it with Johnny Minkley.

Can you tell us what sort of stuff you doing for CVG then?

I was mostly there in a similar role as before, a



» [Nintendo 64] *Super Mario 64* ranks as one of Paul's favourite games from his CVG days.

kind of consultant/editor-type thing – working with the PR teams to make sure we got all the exclusives and assets. I also wrote one-off guides and contributed to the magazine, where I helped to introduce Xbox Live, wrote tournament coverage in the news section and community stuff. It was a bit of an odd role, so when Dennis Publishing bought CVG they didn't need me. They took the core team but not the add-ons (laughs).

What did you do?

I panicked for a few months and then started my own agency, called Unlikely Hero, with my old EMAP boss Andy McVittie. He was working on a fishing magazine in Peterborough at the time. So, around about 2005 I had that and for many years we were producing games content for Yahoo and Microsoft/Xbox. During that time, I also wrote my first art book for Titan Books, on *Halo 4*, and was dipping my toes into that.

“I would say we were authentic, CVG was authentic. Everybody was themselves”
PAUL DAVIES

And now, what are you working on these days?

Andy is now working for another big publisher, covering heavy industrial-type stuff. Me, I got quite heavy in pushing my consultancy credentials. One of the highlights from that included working on the *Life Is Strange* series with Square Enix. I also ended up doing this book called *Marvel Contest Of Champions* with Titan. Marvel

quite liked it and so they approached me directly to write an art book on the *Eternals*. I've also just done one on *What If...?* – the animation series on Disney+. So that's been exciting in terms of the size of the project and significance for the audience. It's been great working directly with the artists and producers on these products over Zoom calls.

Wrapping up, what is it that you think made CVG so special?

The CVG thing was the team composition. I would say we were authentic, CVG was authentic. Everybody was themselves. It wasn't like we set off to make it look like this or talk about these sorts of games, it was coming from a daily conversation between everybody on that team. Probably the best thing you can say about it is that almost everyone has gone on to do great things. They were good people, exceptional people, who wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else at that time. *

Special thanks to Time Extension's Damien McFerran for assisting with various magazine images.

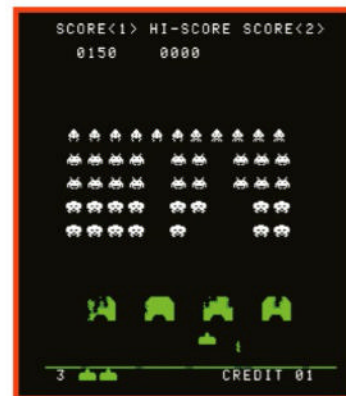
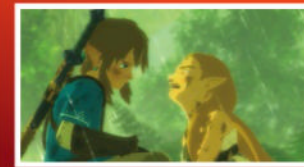


» Issue 174 was the revamp issue. It's also notable for having Paul's favourite CVG cover.

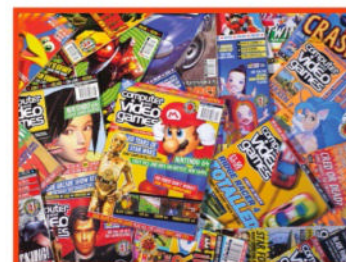
FUTURE CLASSIC

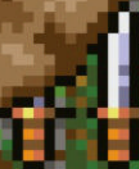
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

“*Breath Of The Wild* seems to be one that has become a new benchmark for a combination of open world, freedom and experimentation, but also a great story. I think a decade from now that is one that will still be celebrated.”



» [Arcade] Paul remembers *Space Invaders* as a standout game – and not just for being in his local Tesco.





LIFE



Undeadline

RETRO ALCHEMY

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA DRIVE » 1991 » T&E SOFT

As retro gaming has become increasingly expensive, I've had to curtail the amount of spending I do on my hobby.

Don't get me wrong, I still find ways to buy some of the more expensive titles I'd like to play, but I totally understand why so many gamers are now turning to emulation in order to enjoy the games they can't justify spending hundreds of pounds on.

My most expensive purchase of 2024 has been an obscure Mega Drive shoot-'em-up called *Undeadline*, which started off life on the MSX2 and MSX2+, before being ported to the Sharp X68000 and Sega's console. It's a truly superb on-foot shooter with a distinct fantasy theme, brutal difficulty and a gauntlet of hard-as-nails bosses to take down, and it's absolutely not worth the £350 it cost me.

My wife and daughters use something called 'girl maths' which they use to justify the purchases they make. It might be a case that the item they wanted was 80% off and was therefore too cheap to ignore, or it only cost £3 more to upgrade to the more expensive option. They mention it all the time, and although I don't use girl maths myself, I have something similar that I like to call 'retro alchemy' which allows me to make otherwise expensive purchases.

Because I can't justify spending £350 on a single videogame, I simply trade or sell stuff I own instead. *Undeadline* (and a few other titles) were acquired because I traded in around 45 games with an online seller who gave me a very fair trade price for them. With space in my retro shed at a premium, exchanging nearly 50 games I no longer play for 12 that I will play seems sensible and it also means that I'm not wasting my money, which can then go towards some more useful things.

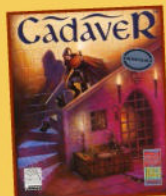
I'm effectively transforming items I no longer want into items I covet without having the huge costs attached to them. Granted, I could probably just play *Undeadline* on emulation and save myself a lot of hassle, but where's the fun in that? ★



THE MAKING OF

Cadaver

PUTTING FRENETIC-PACED ARCADE GAMES TO ONE SIDE FOR A MOMENT, THE BITMAP BROTHERS MADE ITS WAY INTO THE WORLD OF ISOMETRIC 3D ADVENTURES AND FOUND AN AUDIENCE EAGER FOR MORE. MIKE MONTGOMERY, DAN MALONE AND GRAEME BOXALL RECALL THE EXPERIENCE
WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
IMAGEWORKS
- » **DEVELOPER:**
THE BITMAP BROTHERS
- » **PLATFORM:**
ATARI ST, AMIGA, MS DOS
- » **RELEASED:**
1990
- » **GENRE:**
ACTION ADVENTURE

Cadaver was a challenge. It was difficult, it took a long time to complete and it felt like plunging into the unknown at times – and that was just for the developers. For when The Bitmap Brothers created this acclaimed action adventure game, the industry's self-professed "rock stars" was effectively finding its feet in a genre it had never attempted to craft before. The fact it pulled it off to the same high standard as its other titles was testament to the abundance of talent and skill which ran throughout the company's small team.

"We just wanted to make the game," says Mike Montgomery, one of the developer's three cofounders. "We'd worked on two arcade-type titles, the scrolling shooter *Xenon* and the futuristic sports game *Speedball*, but we didn't want to be pigeon-holed. We wanted to try something new and we'd been looking at isometric games on the Spectrum such as *Knight Lore*. But, yes, it posed problems because we'd never really done anything like it. It really was a challenge."

Steve Kelly, another of the cofounders, was the game's primary driving force. It was his



» [Amiga] Lobbing a pickaxe from afar at this particular wall is enough to see it crumble.

desire to develop an adventure game which saw him create a simple 3D map maker on the Atari ST which, he later told *Amiga Power* magazine, was "not unlike the old 8-bit ones". Called the Adventure Level Editor, the tool made it incredibly easy for a designer to put together isometric 3D levels without the need for any programming experience.

Initially, a level would be created in 2D by defining the size of a room – anything from 3x3 to 10x10 floor tiles – and a map would be created, showing any pathways from one room to another. A designer would then be able to select a room which

would display as a 3D shell with a defined height up to eight units that could be filled with graphic blocks. Doors would be automatically added depending on the position of the corridors and objects would be placed in each room, effectively taking a Lego-like approach to the visual construction of each defined space.

Steve, who had previously worked at Psion Software before going freelance, told *Amiga Power* that the editor was started "almost for fun" and "simply grew out of proportion". Indeed, the Adventure Level Editor spawned the development of the Adventure Creator Language. It gave objects a unique number and instructed how they could be used depending



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

XENON

PLATFORM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, MS DOS, ZX SPECTRUM, C 64, AMSTRAD CPC, MSX

RELEASED: 1988

SPEEDBALL

PLATFORM: C64, MASTER SYSTEM, ATARI ST

RELEASED: 1988

THE CHAOS ENGINE (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, MS DOS, MEGA DRIVE, SNES, AMIGA CD32

RELEASED: 1993

"IT POSED PROBLEMS BECAUSE WE'D NEVER REALLY DONE ANYTHING LIKE IT. IT REALLY WAS A CHALLENGE"

MIKE MONTGOMERY



» [Amiga] For this puzzle, you need to push the buttons on the wall in a particular sequence.





» [Amiga] At one point, Karadoc needs to pass himself off as a king so he needs to find the essential items.

on the current state of the game. For instance, it would determine if a lever was on or off, if an object could be touched, moved or taken and what could happen if the player had been able to interact with an item. Entirely flexible, it could make light work of otherwise complex processes.

"The language meant we could easily create the game across multiple formats and develop updates with minimal programming," says Mike, pointing to the game's creation on the Atari ST and the conversions to the Amiga and DOS. "I think we were really forward-thinking with that and it certainly made it a lot easier to convert the game. It also sped up the creation of the expansion pack that we ended up making." Even so, development of all the nuts and bolts that would form the basis of *Cadaver* still ended up taking six months. Only from that point on did the game begin to flesh out.

Cadaver's graphics were originally created by Robin Chapman, an accomplished artist who had worked on games such as *After Shock*, *Cerberus* and *Space Station Oblivion*, primarily for the Amstrad CPC, Amstrad PCW and ZX Spectrum. With *Into The Eagle's Nest* he had also started working on the Atari ST, DOS and Amiga and he was clearly at home creating art for the 16-bit systems.

Inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons* and a love of painting Citadel miniatures, Robin created *Cadaver*'s main character – a dwarf who ended up going by the name Karadoc. He also produced monsters, dragons and a host of enemies (each of which were assigned numerical qualities for power, intelligence, strength and more) as well as background tiles



NOOKS & CRANNIES

YOU REALLY NEEDED TO KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED IN CADAVER

■ As well as demanding lateral thought, *Cadaver* also requires patience and a great willingness to explore. If you're to successfully guide the game's bounty hunter through the castle and defeat the Necromancer then you need to look for clues in everything you see and that includes in the patterns on the walls and on the floors.

In some cases, you even have to be alert to the position of the exits or you'll find yourself endlessly wandering looking for a way forward and that's because this is a game which requires you to experiment in order to get your bearings. It means checking every barrel, every chest and more just in case it throws up something important, although, as you'll discover, you'll also find items that are superfluous to your quest.

Objects can be affected by other objects and you may find some nestled inside others. Some puzzles also have multiple solutions – you could use a potion to get you a room to find a key to unlock a door or teleport to another room to get you into pretty much the same position, for example (there's no set order for puzzles to be solved). This gives players a greater feeling of freedom.



» [Amiga] The castle's prisons are a gruesome place but you need to get among the bones.



EXPANDING CADAVER

LOVE STROLLING AROUND CASTLE WULF? THEN YOU NEED CADAVER'S EXPANSION PACK

■ One of the main benefits of creating a unique programming language for the development of *Cadaver* was the ability to quickly create an expansion of the first game. That came in the guise of *Cadaver: The Payoff* which was released in 1991. Picking up where the last game left off (and requiring gamers to own the original), this highly rated release gave players another four levels consisting of 250 rooms. While that was smaller than before, it still provided a substantial, rewarding experience. In fact, the game was actually tougher.

As well as integrating monsters into a fresh set of puzzles (you could get them to gather gold for you), the game made use of new rooms and even ventured outside into the surrounding village which made it feel a little less claustrophobic. The developers had also learned from the development of the main game which meant the puzzles were more logical this time around (Steve Kelly told *Amiga Power* the team had simply "got better at it").

And while *The Payoff* was the last official game, the adventure didn't stop there. *The Last Supper* demo, created by *Soldiers Of Hell*, appeared on *Zero* magazine's coverdisk (issue 23), picking up from the end of the expansion disk.



» [Atari ST] There are lots of monsters to contend with but thankfully this worm causes less damage than others.

► that could be picked by the level designer to line the walls and floors.

Lots of graphics were needed because the original aim was to create a castle spread over five floors, each one comprising 100 rooms. As it turned out, this was

scaled back to speed up the game's development but it still entailed a lot of hard work given the idea was to ensure much visual variety. Aiding the process was Dan Malone, an artist who had wanted to draw comic strips but ended up working for Palace Software on *Cauldron* and *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*.

Dan had joined The Bitmap Brothers and worked on *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*. He was also starting on *The Chaos Engine* but Steve asked a favour.

"He asked me if I'd re-do the main character in *Cadaver* – Robin had left and they wanted the character to be created in pieces so there would be separate arms, legs and a torso," Dan says. This reduced the memory size of the character while still allowing for fluid animation and a large overall sprite. Dan was then asked to continue working on the game. "I redid all of the backgrounds and created tiles that



» [Atari ST] Some puzzles involve moving items such as a barrel in order to gain access to something higher up.

were like bricks with a top and an edge that could be stacked but I've never done it like that since. When I went to work for Eurocom Developments on *Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets* for the Game Boy Advance more than ten years later, I asked them how they wanted their isometric tiles doing and they said, 'What are you talking about, just give us flat tiles that we can interlace together.'

While Dan was creating fresh graphics, Steve continued beaver away, refining the game's mechanics. "He was working quietly next to ashtrays full of teabags and butt ends," Dan laughs. The pair worked independently for much of the time allowing Dan the freedom to be creative. "He'd look over at my screen and say, 'Yeah, that's it, great bro,' and I'd just say, 'Sweet,'" Dan says. "I like working

"THE OFFICE WAS ON THE THAMES AND IT WAS RIDDLED WITH MICE"
GRAEME BOXALL

like that. There's a lot of trust and I just got on with it. But I remember really sweating over the arches in the game, trying to get the isometric look right. I mean now it's completely firm in my head but back then I couldn't get the bloody angle right. I got there in the end, though, and I'm really pleased with those arches."

Dan also created objects such as the barrels and chests and he worked on the status area



» [Atari ST] You literally need to examine everything you can in order to find the items needed to solve puzzles.

» [Atari ST] There are plenty of levers to pull in order to access other areas of the castle.



— actually creating it twice. “The phone rang at 2am and it was Eric Matthews [The Bitmap Brothers’ third cofounder] saying there was a problem with the hard drive,” Dan explains. “Mike was working away trying to get the data and the graphics back and eventually we rescued most of it. But I’d just finished the status area and all of that had gone so I had to do it again, thinking, ‘Oh what I’d done was so nice.’ I remembered what I’d created but when you try and replicate what’s in your head, it’s never the same. It irritated me for ages.”

The hard drive in question had a 350 MB capacity and it was connected to a 386 PC with its own 40MB hard drive and 4MB of RAM as well as a host of

Atari ST computers used by the team. The Atari ST had become the lead platform for this game because it was Steve’s favourite machine but the PCs ensured the developers had access to assemblers and editors – Snasm on the PC made light work of compiling and debugging *Cadaver*’s code so it made perfect sense to it.

Dan preferred to create his graphics on the Amiga, however. “I used DPaint. Everything was on DPaint,” he says. “I used the full Amiga palette for the Amiga and DOS versions but I limited the palette for the Atari ST. The Amiga was my main workhorse and I had a 1200 with a booster in it. I’d squeeze everything I could out of a collection of pixels.” This is why the game looked highly detailed.

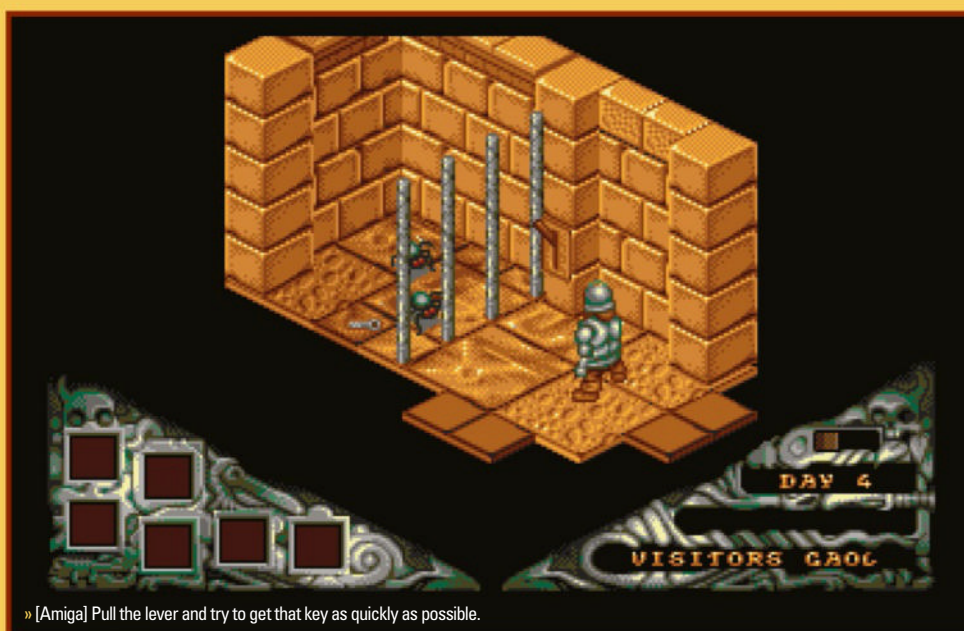
Once the graphics were created, Phil Wilcox built each level. He was able to shape the game and work out which puzzles would work well. “He took my blocks and built the game from them,” Dan says. “I’d casually check what he was doing and sometimes I’d say, ‘That one doesn’t go with that one,’ but he was getting as much variety in the game as possible.”



» [Amiga] You sometimes need to tread carefully. With a flick-screen game such as *Cadaver*, you can’t always see the pitfalls heading your way.



» [Amiga] By taking creative routes around rooms, you can avoid enemies with relative ease.



» [Amiga] Pull the lever and try to get that key as quickly as possible.



» [Amiga] You're often found trying to get an item when foes are intent on stopping you.



» [Amiga] Work your way around this room, finding the tile floor switches in the right order and you'll get a potion to unlock a later door.



» [Amiga] With the potion to hand, you can then continue on your merry way.

► With more than 90 types of wall block per level, the resulting game certainly felt varied and worked generally progressed without a hitch. But there were some issues that needed to be dealt with, chief among them getting on top of a rodent issue which was plaguing the studio. This task appeared to fall to Phil. "The office was on the River Thames in London and it was riddled with mice so we used to call him Trapper Phil because he caught them at night," says producer Graeme Boxall who began work on *Cadaver* when its development was well under way.

While this was going on, the gameplay was being refined along with the story which, loosely, revolved around Karadoc, a thief, raiding Castle Wulf, avoiding obstacles and monsters, collecting items, combining them, upgrading weapons and solving puzzles with the ultimate aim of bagging treasure and slaying the necromancer Dianos. Players would control Karadoc's movement using a joystick, moving in four or eight directions. They could also make use of an icon system – the available options dependent on what could be done at that time. "The icons were needed in order to make it all work," Mike says.

As Karadoc traversed the flick-screen adventure, players would interact with hundreds of objects, cast spells, climb stairs, jump and try to figure where they were and where they were going. It was, as Mike explains, something of a paper chase which is why the game was originally codenamed *Anneka*, after Anneka Rice the presenter of Channel 4's *Treasure Hunt* in the UK. But it was also instantly tricky. Many players struggled to get their head around the controls. "That could be due to us trying an isometric game for the first



» [Amiga] In this puzzle, you're grabbing marbles and popping them in the eyes of a skull.



» [Amiga] Each level has dozens of rooms to explore with puzzles galore throughout.



» [Amiga] There are so many interactive elements throughout the game which ensures players keep going.

time," says Mike. "It was probably logical for us to do it the way we did it, though."

To help push players forward, there were documents which gave clues such as explaining a gem was hidden beneath a sack. "It made life a bit easier for players," Mike says, acknowledging the challenge which lay ahead for them. In some ways, it was one of only a few concessions aimed at toning the difficulty down a notch. If you wanted to save your game, for example, it would cost you in-game gold – and the price would rise with each subsequent save. "There was no point collecting something if there was no use for it," Mike says of the gold. "Plus the fact we were bastards."

As time went on, more small changes were made. "Up until the summer before the game was released, everything had a weight and lots of other stats," Graeme explains of one decision. "Eric took them out to streamline the gameplay." Eric also looked to refine the game, approaching it with a fresher pair of eyes. "I did a lot of low level stuff and some testing," says Mike. "But Eric towards the end was tweaking it and getting better gameplay out of it, making sure the puzzles were the best they could be."

"I GOT BACK ON THE MONDAY AND MANAGED TO CRASH THE GAME IN THE FIRST ROOM"
GRAEME BOXALL

Those final few weeks were stressful for the team. It was a crunch period in which the bulk of the game came together and it was all hands on deck for the

developers. "We didn't really have any free time," Graeme says. "I cancelled a holiday so that I was around to test." There were some inevitable mishaps at this point. Having managed to grab a short break, Graeme got hold of the Amiga version which had been built by Mike. "The master was approved for production but I got back on the Monday and managed to crash the game in the first room," Graeme says.

Thankfully, the team's effort was worth it.

Cadaver is widely seen as

a success and one of The Bitmap Brothers' best games. It also sold well, particularly in Germany. "I do a lot of interviews and people always mention *Cadaver*," Mike says. "They say they really enjoyed playing it and it comes up in a lot of conversations, probably more than any other game apart from *Xenon*. The isometric view worked well and I was pleased with how it turned out. It's a game we can all be proud of." *



FRESHLY UNEARTHED

YOU CAN ENJOY CADAVER ON DIFFERENT FORMATS TODAY

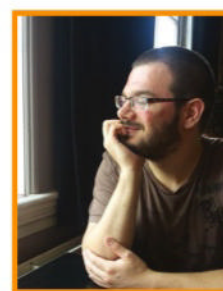
■ If you want to get stuck into *Cadaver* today, you can do so legitimately without having to hunt around for an original copy. You will find the Amiga version of the game on *The Bitmap Brothers Collection 2* for the Evercade handheld and home consoles alongside *Cadaver: The Payoff* which means you will have the full set of levels available to you. Since it's a compilation of Bitmap goodies, you get to play *Gods*, *Magic Pockets*, *The Chaos Engine 2* and *Z* as well.

Cadaver is also built into THE A500 Mini – the tiny console recreation of the Amiga 500 computer. In this case, you won't get the expansion pack but that wouldn't stop you downloading it onto a FAT32-formatted USB stick and running it from there. Finally, if you want to enjoy the game on an Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5 or iOS, you can try Antstream which will also allow the game to play in a browser (which gives the option of using a keyboard as a controller). Again, this will be the Amiga version but it runs extremely well and, with Antstream, you're also able to enjoy *Cadaver: The Payoff*.

SUPER VEHICLE-001 METAL SLUG TACTICS

IN THE KNOW

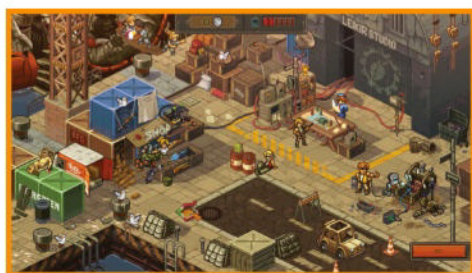
- » **PUBLISHER:**
DOTE MU
- » **DEVELOPER:**
LEIKIR STUDIO
- » **PLATFORM:**
XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X, PC, PS4, PS5, SWITCH
- » **RELEASED:**
OUT NOW
- » **GENRE:**
TACTICAL RPG



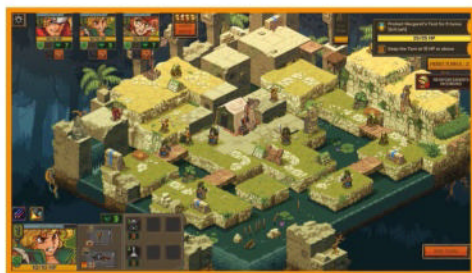
» Aurélien Loos is Leikir Studio's creative director and is a big fan of SNK's *Metal Slug* series.

SNK'S METAL SLUG SERIES IS ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC RUN-AND-GUNS AROUND WITH A LEGACY AS RICH AS ITS METICULOUS 2D ART. SO WHAT CONVINCED SNK TO GREENLIGHT AN ISOMETRIC TACTICAL RPG? WE SPEAK TO LEIKIR STUDIO'S CREATIVE DIRECTOR AURÉLIEN LOOS TO FIND OUT MORE

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES



» [Switch] You'll be able to upgrade your base between battles, buy items from shops and much more.



» [Switch] The game's maps start off quite small, but soon expand in size and complexity.

Taking a classic videogame series in a new direction is always a tricky task and developers don't always succeed. While *Super Mario Kart* proved that

Nintendo's plumber could easily make the jump from platforming to racing, *Castlevania Judgment* simply highlighted that the *Castlevania* fanbase wasn't quite ready for a one-on-one fighter.

Metal Slug Tactics, an isometric tactical RPG from Leikir Studios seems like a baffling sidestep for the popular run-and-gun series, but it's not quite as bold a change of direction as you might think. After all, strategy-based titles like *Metal Slug Touch* and *Metal Slug Defence* have proven the series has legs outside its run-and-gun roots, so in many ways *Metal Slug Tactics* feels like a natural evolution. Albeit an evolution that's taken a while to arrive. "We started talking about the game around the end of 2018," begins Aurélien Loos, creative director of Leikir Studio. "It took a long time, because at the time, Dotemu and Leikir Studio didn't have the financial capacity to launch production. Preproduction began in March 2020, at the same time as containment for COVID!"

Aurélien also admits that *Metal Slug Tactics*' distinctive artwork has also added to the game's delay. "We're a very small team, so producing isometric view assets takes a long time," he explains. "From a gameplay point of view we had to iterate a lot to achieve

what we were trying to do: inject run-and-gun philosophies into a tactical RPG."

Even though the team was aware of *Metal Slug*'s dominance within the run-and-gun genre, they were determined to make a game they knew they could do justice to. "*Metal Slug* games are still fun," Aurélien explains. "They're still incredible games, they haven't aged a day. As a fan, we couldn't see what we could bring to the table if we did another run-and-gun game. It wasn't our expertise and it would have been disrespectful to think we could have done as well in terms of run-and-gun quality. As a creative team, we preferred to propose a new way of exploring this universe."

That decision has meant that SNK has been very aware of the direction that Leikir Studio wanted to take the series and the publisher quickly realised the passion the small team

had for the project. "SNK was very welcoming and kind to us," admits Aurélien. "Our exchanges were mainly around the IP and its respect. Right from the start, even

"WE HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY WE THOUGHT ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF THE GAME"
AURÉLIEN LOOS

before we began discussions, we made a visual prototype to show our graphic skills and our respect for the universe." Aurélien feels that step was important to build "a relationship of trust", while the opportunity to work with original creators of the series was also a highlight of *Metal Slug Tactics*' creation.

With the two genres being so different, the team obviously found certain aspects of *Metal*

Slug Tactics quite tricky to balance. After all, how do you take the chaotic nature of the run-and-gun genre and carry it over to the more slower-paced approach of tactical RPGs? “The most complex thing was to follow our initial idea: to inject some of the run-and-gun philosophy into a tactical RPG when, at first glance, everything opposes these two game genres,” admits Aurélien. “Integrating the characters into the game took a lot of effort, as we wanted them all to be unique in their abilities and powers but it was exciting.”

One thing that has impressed us after playing *Metal Slug Tactics* is how well it does capture the pace of the series.

Granted, it's never going to be as frantic as a run-and-gun but it can feel blisteringly fast compared to a traditional tactical RPG. “We’ve made movement the most important aspect of gameplay,” admits Aurélien. “Being on the move allows your characters to accumulate dodge, which protects you, and adrenaline, which allows you to launch your special attacks. As a result, *Metal Slug Tactics* plays very differently from other tactical RPGs. You need to be on the move, diving into the heart of enemies to exploit your abilities.

It was a challenge, because even from a production point of view, we had to change the way we thought about every aspect of the game, from game design to level design and balance.”

It works exceedingly well and even though *Metal Slug Tactics* may not be at all conventional, it still *feels* like a *Metal Slug* game. We’d also argue that the humour-filled isometric graphics also play a huge part as well. As you might expect, the original 2D assets weren’t suitable for use in *Metal Slug Tactics*, but they still played an important role in the game’s development as Aurélien



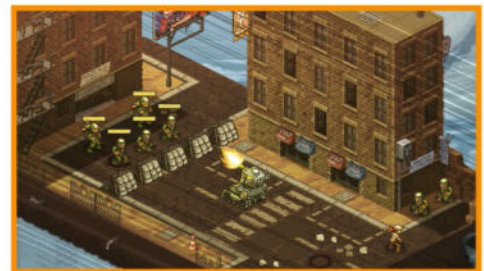
» [Switch] Despite the isometric viewpoint, *Metal Slug Tactics* still captures the humour and detail of the 2D games.

explains. “Yes, we didn’t use any old assets. However, it was very important and practical for us to have them as references to follow. We adapted some of the design very slightly, but that was mainly to meet gameplay constraints. For some bosses, we had to use original sketches never used or shown to players to make them visible in isometric [form]. Aeshi Nero is a good example of this.”

Metal Slug Tactics may be a departure for the series, but that doesn’t mean it should be ignored. We’ve had a lot of fun with it so far and it’s obvious that Aurélien and his team have a lot of love for the series. “As a player, I’m still as happy to restart a game [of *Metal Slug*] as I was when I was ten. When you think about it, that’s an incredible feat that few games can boast. I have nothing but the utmost respect for the *Metal Slug* team, and I wish players a lot of fun with *Metal Slug Tactics*.” ★



» [PC] We like the angular look of the cutscenes, they have a neat anime styling to them.



» [PC] As you’d hope, a variety of vehicles are usable in *Metal Slug Tactics*, including the iconic SV-001 tank.

SLUG IT OUT

Other spin-offs in the series you might like to try



METAL SLUG TOUCH

IOS, 2009

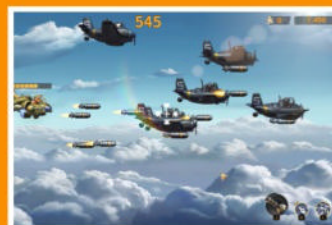
■ Long since delisted, this interesting spin-off of the main series saw you controlling the SV-001 and Slug Flyer through four challenging stages, using only touch controls and tilting your phone for movement.



METAL SLUG DEFENCE

IOS, ANDROID, STEAM, 2016

■ Once you get over your disappointment that it isn’t a conventional *Metal Slug* game, Defence proves itself to be a solid tower defence offering. It’s free to play as well, which is nice.



METAL SLUG: AWAKENING

IOS, ANDROID, STEAM

■ This free-to-play title introduces the ability to team up with two other players and features a number of rogue-like challenges to attempt. It’s currently on its fifth season in China.



METAL SLUG ATTACK RELOADED

SWITCH, PC, PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X, 2024

■ This enhanced update of *Metal Slug Defence*’s sequel was stealth-dropped in June 2024. It’s not free like the original, but has done away with micro-transactions.

RESIDENT EVIL

IN 1998, CAPCOM RETURNED TO THE WORLD OF SURVIVAL HORROR WITH AN AMBITIOUS SEQUEL THAT WOULD PROPEL THE RESIDENT EVIL SERIES INTO THE STRATOSPHERE. JOIN US AS WE REVISIT EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE NECROPOLIS, RACCOON CITY, AND REACQUAINT OURSELVES WITH ITS SHAMBLING POPULACE

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

For fans of the first *Resident Evil*, the game's 1997 *Director's Cut* was an eagerly anticipated release.

This wasn't necessarily because of the core game – which added extra modes and a few new frissons to the survival horror classic – but because it came bundled with a playable demo of *Resident Evil 2*.

This preview finally lifted the veil on the sequel that Capcom had been teasing for more than a year, allowing players to finally experience the aftermath of the 'mansion incident'. In the demo you played new character Leon Kennedy, a rookie cop who arrives in Raccoon City just as a living dead rave hits full swing. Whereas the original was a bit of a slow burn, the sequel dropped you into the thick of it, on a city street surrounded by multiple zombies – who were hungry, and *on fire*. A frantic dash through some alleyways, via a gun shop where you briefly met the unfortunate owner Kendo, brought you to the Raccoon City Police Department and its promised refuge.

The demo only offered about 20 minutes of play, but it was clear that producer Shinji Mikami, director Hideki Kamiya and their team had turned up all the dials. The zombies – in that innocent time when they were still the

domain of George Romero movies and Italian gore flicks, and not yet done to death in popular culture – were the stars of the show and they were given appropriate attention. They were no longer limited to the country clodhoppers from the original and now wore various outfits. Female zombies were also introduced, and they all ambled around with increased curiosity, their heads slowly turning to track you, arms outstretched. The way they recoiled to gunshots was more lifelike (irony

acknowledged), and it was now possible to blow them to bits using the more powerful weapons – arms flying, legs akimbo. Brilliant.

Character animation on the whole was improved and the pre-rendered backgrounds were far more detailed. This was particularly true in the

ruined city streets and the Gothic police station building. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the demo was that it looked quite different to the early preview screens shown previously. As we now know, the original build of the sequel – officially *Biohazard 2 Prototype*, unofficially *Resident Evil 1.5* – was scrapped due to quality concerns and the game was radically reworked. This decision pushed the release date back to early 1998 and it's claimed that *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* was created to compensate

“WHEREAS THE ORIGINAL WAS A SLOW BURN, THE SEQUEL DROPPED YOU INTO THE THICK OF IT, ON A STREET SURROUNDED BY ZOMBIES”



[PlayStation] In the scrapped *Resident Evil 1.5* build, Claire Redfield's spot was occupied by a different character, Elza Walker.



[PlayStation] The bulk of the game takes place in the spooky RPD, the city's police HQ, which was formally a museum.



[PlayStation] “It looks like your party has been cancelled...” Leon's employee on-boarding process takes a sinister turn.

EVIL 2



CONVERSION CAPERS

LIKE A VIRUS, THE GAME QUICKLY SPREAD FROM SYSTEM TO SYSTEM



PLAYSTATION

■ Building on the original, technically and thematically, the sequel is the classic *Resident Evil* experience. The ports improved the visuals and introduced some extras, making this difficult to recommend in retrospect, but the original is still a nostalgic blast, wobbly polygons and all.



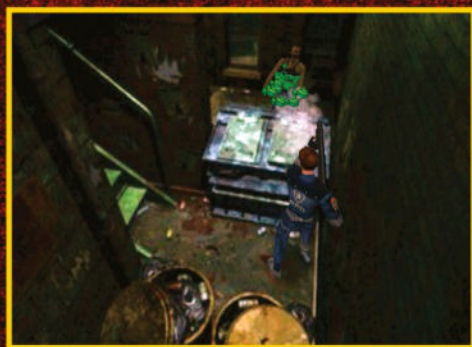
PC

■ The PC release features all of the extra content from the PS1 DualShock version and adds a new Data Gallery which is a library of cutscenes, artwork and other assets. Crucially, it runs at double the resolution of the PS1 version and features higher-quality character models.



DREAMCAST

■ Almost identical to the PC version – same content, comparable graphics quality – but with two notable additions: the FMVs are now displayed full-screen rather than letterboxed, and the VMU is used to display your character's key stats – which is surprisingly useful during play.



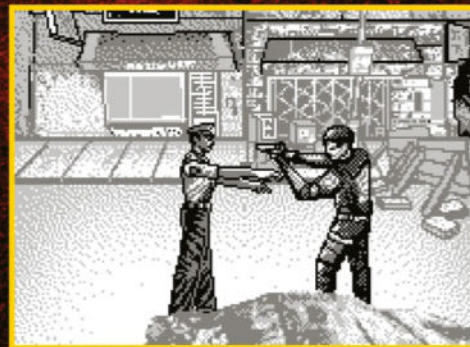
NINTENDO 64

■ And the award for the most ambitious port goes to... this marvel of optimisation that delivers the true *Resident Evil 2* experience on a cartridge system – and even adds features such as the EX Files which explore series lore. Downgraded backgrounds and FMVs are an acceptable concession.



GAMECUBE

■ A strange release, arriving after the GameCube's celebrated remake of *Resident Evil*, but being a straight port of the DualShock version (even the gallery from the PC and DC versions is absent). Two plus points: everything is on one disc, and you can skip cutscenes (bye-bye Marvin's monologue).



GAME.COM

■ If you really want to play *Resident Evil 2* on the go – skip this and copy the PlayStation version to a PSP or Vita. Seriously though, this rough approximation for Tiger's handheld is almost unplayable thanks to the odd viewpoint and wonky controls. It's an interesting curio for fans and little else.

■ [PlayStation] The game wears its horror movie influences on its blood-soaked sleeves.



■ [PlayStation] Replacing the Hunters from the first game, the Lickers were nastier and altogether more frightening.



► for the delay, but we don't buy that – this was Hyper Turbo Arcade Edition Capcom we're talking about, after all. It's clear that the Japanese giant was in franchise-building mode and the *Resident Evil* series was a slow train gathering steam.

When the sequel finally arrived we could appreciate the bigger, better approach that the demo teased. As in the original, there were two playable characters – Leon was joined by Claire Redfield, the sister of Chris from the first game – but their exploits were now spread across two discs. In addition, each character had two scenarios, meaning you could play through the game four times and each run would be slightly different (the second scenario memorably introduced Mr X, the tyrant in a trench coat). Capcom made a lot of noise about what it called the zapping system, where actions taken in the first scenario would affect events in the second. But this feature was inconsistent and rather inconsequential in the end. Probably the most interesting 'zap' involved the oversized alligator you faced in the sewers. If you defeated it following the scripted method (death by ignited gas canister), the tunnels would be reptile-free in the second scenario, but if you instead incapacitated it with bullets, it would return to menace you once more on your return run.

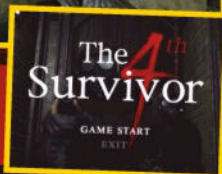
The gator encounter was one of several setpieces that led some critics to compare the game favourable to movies. Reviewing the game for GameSpot, Ryan MacDonald awarded the game 8.9/10 and wrote, "With its unique camera angles, storyline, graphics, sound effects, and music, *Resident Evil 2* seems more like a product out of Hollywood

THE MODES TO HELL

EXHUMING THE EXTRA MODES AND HIDDEN MINIGAMES



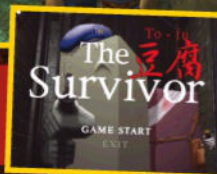
THE 4TH SURVIVOR



■ Available in every version and typically unlocked by completing both scenarios (and scoring an A rank in at least one of them), you have to guide supercop Hunk through 24 enemy-filled rooms, with scarce supplies. It's pretty difficult! Top advice: tip-toe past the Lickers.



THE TO-FU SURVIVOR



■ Unlocking this is a joke (complete both scenarios *three times*, earning an A ranking in *each one*) and the actual minigame is equally daft – a spin on The 4th Survivor where you play a piece of squeaky bean curd armed only with a knife. For completists only.



EXTREME BATTLE



■ Introduced in the PS1 DualShock version, this mode is unlocked by beating both scenarios on Normal difficulty. Featuring three skill levels and four playable characters (including a neat cameo from *Resident Evil*'s Chris Redfield), you must find bombs in semi-random locations.



» [PlayStation] Although the sequel was more action-orientated, there were still a number of pleasing puzzles to solve.



than the videogame industry. It surpasses its predecessor in nearly every aspect." Over at IGN, Rick Sanchez was similarly impressed with the game's cinematic qualities. "One area where Capcom is dead on is atmosphere," he wrote. "The graphics, sound effects, music and level design all work together to keep you on the edge of your seat. In fact, *Resident Evil 2* may have the best sound design yet for a console game." This comment will chime with many fans, as the soundtrack (overseen by lead composer Masami Ueda) brilliantly balanced traditional horror genre 'stingers' with quietly foreboding pieces, like the piano-driven themes that play in the police department's entrance hall and the save/safe rooms.

"THE ORIGINAL BUILD OF THE SEQUEL - RESIDENT EVIL 1.5 - WAS SCRAPPED DUE TO QUALITY CONCERNS"

Sanchez scored the game 9.3/10, but did highlight a few misgivings in his review. "Aiming is still difficult, especially if you get trapped at the edge of a camera's view. The puzzles are less interesting than in the first game, posing little challenge to the experienced adventure gamer. Inventory management is still a pain." The aiming and the inventory issues were holdovers from the first game, but the comment about puzzles carried weight. Perhaps in response to criticisms levelled at the first game, that some of the puzzles were frustrating and involved too much backtracking, progression through the sequel was relatively trouble-free – and quick. See the review ►

RESI-RECTING A CLASSIC

HOW CAPCOM REINVENTED SURVIVAL HORROR FOR A NEW GENERATION

■ Fans were calling on Capcom to remake *Resident Evil 2* ever since the first game received a remake back in 2002. Their wishes were finally granted in 2019 when the new version was released for PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC. And it was absolutely worth the wait. By taking what is many fans' favourite *Resi* story and setting, and marrying it with a modern third-person over-the-shoulder viewpoint, Capcom created a nigh-on perfect remake.

Its greatest trick is taking the familiar and making it as frightening as hell. The police station's east hallway was a brightly lit corridor in the original; in the remake, it's a black hellhole crawling with zombies! Every setpiece (bar that alligator boss, which is a disappointing QTE), has been refined, the tension heightened, the effect multiplied. The showpiece arrives in the second run-through with the arrival of the revamped Mr X, an enemy who's so good he deserves his own TV chat show. Add in *The Ghost Survivors* – several extra scenarios which expand on the Extreme Battle concept – and the end result is a remake done right. The only missed opportunity was not including the original as a bonus unlockable, if only to emphasise how far videogames have come.



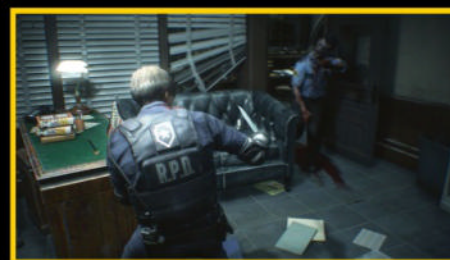
NIGHTMARE MODE

■ A feature of the Dreamcast version, and unlocked by beating Expert difficulty, this is hands down the toughest way to play *RE2*. No auto-aim, enemies soak up bullets, pick-ups are limited by a third, and you can be done in by a couple of zombie bites. A nightmare indeed.



RANDOMIZER MODE

■ This mode appears in the Nintendo 64 version in place of Extreme Battle. It's basically the standard game where non-essential pick-ups are randomised. So instead of handgun bullets you might find shotgun shells, or a first aid spray. It's a nice addition for seasoned players.



BOSS RUSH

HOW TO BEAT EVERY BEASTLY BOSS ACROSS BOTH SCENARIOS. BUCKLE UP!



G-TYPE

■ The small and slimy G-Virus parasite transforms into a four-legged thing that pukes up its offspring before prowling towards you.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: The little 'uns have a nasty bite so take them out first. Do not underestimate the main boss; use the submachine gun or similar.



GIANT ALLIGATOR

■ This rampaging reptile was spoiled by all the previews, but it's still an impressive encounter when you finally enter the sewers.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Hit the button on the tunnel wall to release the gas canister. When the gator gobbles it up, shoot the canister to blow its head off.



BIRKIN ROUND 1

■ Mr William Birkin will become a familiar foe. Here he chases you around the tram, trying to shish kebab you with his clawed hand.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: He advances slowly, so get some distance then turn and fire. Leon should wield his shotgun; Claire is best using flame rounds.



GIANT MOTH

■ Officially this is a boss, but it's just a wee beastie compared to the others. It flaps clumsily around and tries to deliver poisonous bites.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: If you're Leon, use the flamethrower and it's over very quickly. As Claire, flame rounds work a treat, but the submachine gun should suffice.



BIRKIN ROUND 2

■ When you activate the lift, Birkin will rejoin the party. He's uglier and more aggressive now and can swipe away chunks of health.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Retreat and fire as he advances towards you. For Leon it's a job for the magnum. For Claire, get pinging off those grenade rounds.



BIRKIN ROUND 3

■ A continuation of the previous fight, Birkin transforms once more, sprouting extra limbs and leaping around the lab like a zombie XL Bully.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: The same as in the previous round. Just be aware he's more mobile now, so maintain your distance. Defeat him to finish Scenario A.



BIRKIN ROUND 4

■ In Scenario B you finally get to encounter Birkin's initial, almost-human form in place of the G-Type. He'll try and brain you with a metal pipe.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: He's slow and clumsy but rather resilient, so bring out the big guns – that means the magnum for Leon, grenade rounds for Claire.



BIRKIN ROUND 5

■ This is a re-run of Round 1, only in Scenario B ole Birks is now twice as ugly and has an extra pair of elongated arms to tickle you with.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: He's more formidable now, naturally, and will jump on top of the tram. Use the same weapons as before, but don't linger in one spot if you can help it.



TYRANT

■ Mr X is back, sans trench coat, revealing himself to be another Tyrant, albeit one that's massively mutated. He's now less stalky, more speedy.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Show's almost over so don't worry about saving ammo. Leon should use his magnum, Claire the acid rounds. End him with the rocket launcher.



BIRKIN ROUND 6

■ Birks returns one final time. He's now just a train-hogging mass of teeth and tentacles that stands between you and the end credits.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Back yourself against the carriage door and hammer every last bit of ammo you have into its mush. Now sit back and enjoy the true ending.



» [PC] In the second scenario, super tyrant Mr X regularly pops around for a chat and a brew.



» [PC] Arachnophobes would do well to keep on their toes when down in the sewers.



» [PC] Leon encounters the mysterious Ada Wong while exploring the labyrinthine police building.



► in *Computer & Video Games* magazine, where Steve Key called the game “awesome”, but drew attention to contrasting comments from readers, “Our forum page has differing views on *RE2*, many complaining that it’s too short.” It was realistic to beat Leon’s first scenario in under five hours, and while there was Claire’s story and the second scenarios available, you would experience a lot of what the game had to offer on that first run through. So unless you wanted to see and do everything, and unlock the special weapons and bonus minigames, was *Resident Evil 2* an overnight rental proposition?

Of course not. The game was a huge worldwide hit and the initial PlayStation release went on to achieve lifetime sales of five million copies. As with the original, Capcom capitalised on its success with an updated version dubbed the DualShock version, which added analogue controls and rumble support, plus an unlockable new minigame, Extreme Battle. Of interest, the Japanese DualShock version included two Arranged games: Rookie Mode and USA Version. The former was a super-easy mode where you began the game with an unlimited submachine gun, while the latter featured the slightly more difficult arrangement released in the US (players had less health, enemies were stronger, auto-aim was not on by default

“EACH CHARACTER HAD TWO SCENARIOS, MEANING YOU COULD PLAY THROUGH THE GAME FOUR TIMES AND EACH RUN WOULD BE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT”

and some of the ammo pick-ups were hidden in the backgrounds). For some reason, the US version did not reciprocate by including the easier Japanese arrangement, but Rookie Mode was included instead.

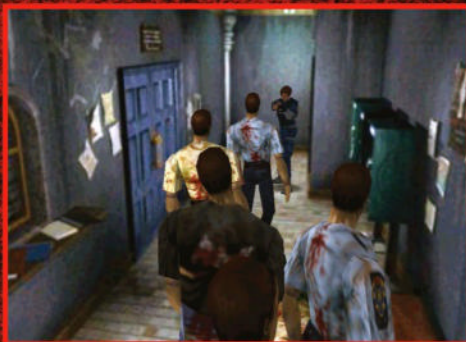
The DualShock version wasn’t released in Europe, yet it would serve as the template for the PC, Dreamcast and GameCube ports that were released worldwide.

These conversions were solid if unspectacular, but a special mention must be reserved for the Nintendo 64 version, which somehow crammed 1.2GB of content into a 64MB cartridge. It’s so impressive we’ve shined the spotlight on it over the page.

Resident Evil 2 received a celebrated remake in 2019, which should be most people’s preferred way of revisiting Leon and Claire’s story these days. But if you do hanker after the OG experience, then the easiest way is to grab the PC version from GOG. Alternatively, the PS1 version is still available on the PS3 shop (at the time of writing, at least), and of course the GameCube version is playable on Wii. Note that physical copies of the game generally command a premium, but perhaps it’s a small price to pay to own a seminal piece of survival horror history. ★



[Nintendo 64] The combination of smooth 3D models and low-res backgrounds gives the characters a slightly floaty appearance.



[Nintendo 64] This version certainly isn't shy when it comes to filling the screen with enemies.



[Nintendo 64] It's possible to change the colour of the blood – yet it doesn't affect the enemy's pre-existing appearance.

THE MINI-MAKING OF RESIDENT EVIL 2

PROJECT DIRECTOR CHRIS FODOR REVEALS HOW SMALL US DEVELOPER ANGEL STUDIOS DEFIED THE ODDS - AND CAPCOM'S OWN DOUBTS - BY SQUEEZING RESIDENT EVIL 2 ONTO THE NINTENDO 64

How did Angel Studios land the job of converting *Resident Evil 2* to the Nintendo 64?

We had previously done *Ken Griffey Jr* for the N64, which was the first game that Angel Studios ever released, so we had the technical skills and had learned a lot working on that project. The team was given the option of making a play for porting *Resident Evil 2* or working on *Spider-Man 64*. We looked at both options but felt our small studio wasn't ready to take on *Spider-Man* because it required a lot of gameplay and might suffer the same fate as *Superman 64* – draw distance! A port felt right as that played to our technical skills with a proven game design. We actually went to Japan to talk to Capcom, who clearly didn't expect as much from the project as we delivered.

Did you raise any initial concerns with Capcom about the appropriateness of the port?

We didn't raise any concerns. This is a classic case of being too foolish to know what isn't possible so you end up doing it anyway. There was a discussion of replacing the cutscenes with still frames and audio. That was a fallback but it didn't sit right with anyone on the team. We were going to make it happen. Thank goodness for 64MB cartridges.



» Chris Fodor, who headed up a team of nine full-time developers tasked with making *Resident Evil 2* work on the N64.

"CAPCOM CLEARLY DIDN'T EXPECT AS MUCH FROM THE PROJECT AS WE DELIVERED"

CHRIS FODOR

But still, there were two CDs full of data and you had one relatively tiny cart...

We did have the wind at our backs in one respect. Many assets were duplicated across the two discs, so even though there was 1.2GB of data, a lot of the cutscenes were repeated. Something might flip to Leon and he'll say and do the same thing as he did on the other disc with Claire. This does *not* mean it was easy, as the PlayStation version could simply duplicate the video and make one cutscene. We identified the similarities and put one copy on the ROM triggered at the right time. This required pulling apart and identifying the overlap, and also required a ROM which could play a scene immediately in a different order. This would have not been possible without the incredible FMV work by Todd Meynink. I don't want to minimise the contributions of other team members. Everyone crushed it.

What would you say was the most challenging aspect you had to overcome?

You probably want to hear a single answer,

but every couple of weeks came a new challenge. Code with comments in Japanese that didn't follow unwritten Western coding protocols. Understanding how the rendering system worked. Figuring out how much space to allocate to which area, be it sound, backgrounds, models, FMV. Time deadlines. Even internal Angel Studios issues. Obviously the FMV was the big challenge, but that meant it got attention from the start. The other issues just popped up as the project went on. I recall having daily meetings and someone asked, "Should we be worried?" I said, "Yes, let's worry... OK, worry over, let's get to work."

Ha, did that help to reassure them?

It sounds a bit mean in retrospect, but I just meant let's focus on what's under our control.

On the subject of external factors, did you experience any interference from Capcom, or Nintendo for that matter?

Capcom didn't have much to say besides, "Let's get this done." Initially Capcom didn't expect much more than a perfunctory effort, diplomatically stating that we were not considered first-rate. Nintendo required the blood colour change option and is still pretty strict about how games appear and behave on its platforms, as everyone knows. Nintendo was actually helpful when we initially discussed a



» [Nintendo 64] The enemy attacks ramp up significantly in the sequel, so you're kept on your toes at all times.

32MB cartridge and we were told a 64MB cartridge was possible with save space on the cartridge. 32MB would have definitely meant a version with static cutscenes. Capcom took a risk authorising the bigger cart, and it worked out. I remember how heavy the final product felt.

Your version actually adds content that was exclusive to the N64. Was this requested by Capcom, or added by yourselves?

Requested by Capcom, who had complete creative control. I think the analogue controls came from us, but as far as things like the EX Files, that came entirely from Capcom. The Randomizer mode was unique and from Capcom as well. It's great to see that people valued that additional content. Some thought did go into it and I love that it differentiated our version.

Looking back, do you have any regrets about taking on the job?

Regrets? No, I'd do it a hundred times again. There's a liberty when you're younger and can

"I VIEWED IT AS A CHANCE TO PROVE OUR TECHNICAL CHOPS"
CHRIS FODOR



tolerate a risk of failure without that affecting a family. It was a good choice. I always viewed it as a chance to prove our technical chops, and we did.

OK, to put it another way, would you have attempted Resident Evil 3 if Capcom had asked?

Resident Evil 3 didn't make financial sense as PlayStation 2 was just around the corner. Angel Studios did talk with Capcom about a little game that ended up being called *Dino Crisis*, but we didn't end up taking it. We produced some tech in that direction which became [coin-op game] *Savage Quest*.

Thank you for your time, Chris.

I love telling 'war stories' and have immersed myself in games since I first played the NES. The fact that people are still talking about this game 25 years later is truly priceless. ★



» [Nintendo 64] Check the briefcase on the bus at the beginning and you'll find one of the 16 exclusive EX Files.



» [Nintendo 64] The EX Files cover the series backstory, even referencing events in the then-unreleased *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* and *Resident Evil Zero*.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES
YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



PLAYSTATION

The PlayStation is now 30 years old, and to celebrate we've decided to dive into its rich library and pick out some interesting games that don't receive much discussion today

Words by Nick Thorpe



» [PlayStation] Merge your monsters for more diverse magical attacks, and even new elemental combinations.



» [PlayStation] It's time to capture a monster, in a sequence that's just slightly too drawn out.



» [PlayStation] The character designs are far stronger than the dialogue and plot on offer.

JADE COCOON: STORY OF THE TAMAMAYU

■ DEVELOPER: GENKI ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **Pokémon** was one of the smash hits of the mid-Nineties, with millions taking on the challenge of catching 151 diverse critters. Of course, being a Nintendo exclusive, owners of other platforms missed out on the fun – but that's where games like *Jade Cocoon* come in. Just like the *Pokémon* games, it's an RPG in which you fight a variety of monsters that you can catch and deploy in battle, but it's far from being a direct clone.

For a start, there's a very different plot. Where the story of *Pokémon* emphasises personal glory, *Jade Cocoon* tasks you with saving your community, where many villagers have fallen into a

magical sleep following a demon attack. As the Cocoon Master, only you can soothe the spirits of the forest creatures and find a cure for the curse. There's a lot of emphasis on ancient tales and spiritualism that gives the game a decidedly different feel, and the game's cast looks great thanks to the work of Katsuya Kondo, a character designer famed for his work on Studio Ghibli films like *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

When you venture out into the pre-rendered 3D locales, you'll notice that enemies are visible as you wander around, and they exhibit different behaviours – some will run from you and others will behave aggressively. It's sometimes

possible to run past monsters if you're pressed for time or low on health, though you'll often struggle to do that as many of the pathways you encounter are fairly narrow.

Once you're in battle, you can fight as your player character, which you'll do fairly often as monsters can't capture other monsters, and you actually start without any. Any monsters you manage to capture must be purified at home, after which you can add up to three to your party, merge them to create new monsters, or spin them into silk which can be sold for cash. Monsters come in four elemental types – water, fire, air and earth – that confer advantages and disadvantages

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

**POKÉMON RED/BLUE**

GAME FREAK, 1996

■ The game that single-handedly revitalised the Game Boy as a platform is still a compelling monster-collecting RPG, even if the character sprites do look decidedly odd compared to today's more standardised designs.

**DIGIMON WORLD**

BEC, 1999

■ If you're looking for an alternative on PlayStation, this early offering from the long-running *Digimon* franchise offers plenty of opportunities to train and battle your monster, but the collection aspect is sadly absent.

**PALWORLD**

POCKETPAIR, 2024

■ The most recent *Pokémon*-like on the scene has drawn criticism for the similarities of some of its monster designs, but the addition of base building, crafting and lots of guns differentiates it from its clear inspiration.

in battle in a rock-paper-scissors fashion.

Jade Cocoon received a reasonably warm critical reception upon release, earning praise for its visuals and particularly its handling of the monster training system. However, reviews also noted that it's not particularly long and the plot isn't exceptional. The game has become a cult favourite in the years since its release, so it now commands a reasonable price – we've seen complete PAL copies sell in the £20-30 range, but they can go as high as £60 and the American NTSC version is no cheaper. If you do take the plunge and find you enjoy it, you may also want to investigate the PS2 sequel. ►

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

■ This handy little guide not only shows you which elements your enemies belong to, but which ones are effective against them.

PROTAGONIST'S POWER

■ Fighting as your character is essential, as your monsters can't retreat from battle, use items or capture any other monsters.

FIGHT FAIR

■ Unlike *Pokémon* but like other RPGs, you can find yourself in combat against multiple enemies. You'll always go it alone though.

ANOTHER LEVEL

■ Monsters earn experience with battle victories, but you earn it by capturing monsters, and enhance your stats with equipment.

IN-DEPTH

Minority Report

WARZONE 2100

■ DEVELOPER: PUMPKIN STUDIOS ■ YEAR: 1999

■ The PlayStation isn't blessed with loads of real-time strategy games, and anyone searching for them is likely to pick obvious choices like *Warcraft II* or the *Command & Conquer* games. If you're looking for something a little different, *Warzone 2100* comes highly recommended – it earned 9/10 in the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*, but rarely receives much attention today. The game is set in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, with the player assuming a role as part of The Project – a group seeking to rebuild civilisation, rather than merely surviving as the world's roaming scavengers do.

Warzone 2100 isn't the most innovative game, but it's so fundamentally sound that it deserves its place in the collection of any fan of the genre, and it does plenty of things you rarely see in PlayStation RTS games. It does have an innovative way of building and upgrading units to fight against the ever-more-difficult enemies, as you can decide what weapons to place on different bodies and types of movement – even hovercrafts can be made.

There's a full 3D engine allowing you to rotate and zoom the camera as you desire, you can create your own units and it's even possible to take direct control of a unit and lead the charge against the enemy yourself. Although you can use the PlayStation Mouse, the game is very well adapted for the DualShock controller so you should be happy so long as you're not using the original digital controller.



» [PlayStation] With our assault on the enemy base failing, we take direct control of our tanks.



» [PlayStation] The goal of the game is to retrieve artefacts from before the bombs dropped.



MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» AUTO DESTRICT

■ DEVELOPER: NEUROSTONE
■ YEAR: 1998

■ Rather than the free-for-all combat of *Twisted Metal* and *Vigilante 8*, *Auto Destruct* has you taking on an evil cult that killed your wife and daughter across a variety of solo missions. It's not a graphically impressive game, but the variety of missions and small yet open city map show Neurostone experimenting in the kind of design areas that eventually resulted in games like *Driver*.



» HEBEREKE'S POPOITTO

■ DEVELOPER: SUCCESS
■ YEAR: 1995

■ This falling block puzzle game from the very early days of the PlayStation is the closest thing the console has to *Dr Mario*, with the primary difference being that your target blocks will move about as you drop blocks. It's not a bad puzzle game, but with PAL copies going for a heck of a lot of money these days, you may wish to opt for a Japanese import instead.



» MICRO MANIACS

■ DEVELOPER: CODEMASTERS
■ YEAR: 2000

■ This racer is the result of Codemasters deciding to try making *Micro Machines* without the licence. Instead of tiny cars, you race tiny humans around huge household environments, with each character boasting their own special weapons. The sales were disappointing and the game has largely been forgotten, but *Micro Maniacs* delivers exactly the kind of action expected of the series, especially with multiple players.



» N20

■ DEVELOPER: GREMLIN INTERACTIVE
■ YEAR: 1998

■ This trippy shooter takes place in endlessly looping tunnels, in which your goal is to shoot all of the nasty insects. It's a little bit like *Tempest* but with plenty of its own quirks, including a combo system that rewards you for shooting enemies of the same type. Add in a licensed soundtrack by American electronic music group The Crystal Method, and it's best played with the lights off and the music cranked up high.

URBAN CHAOS

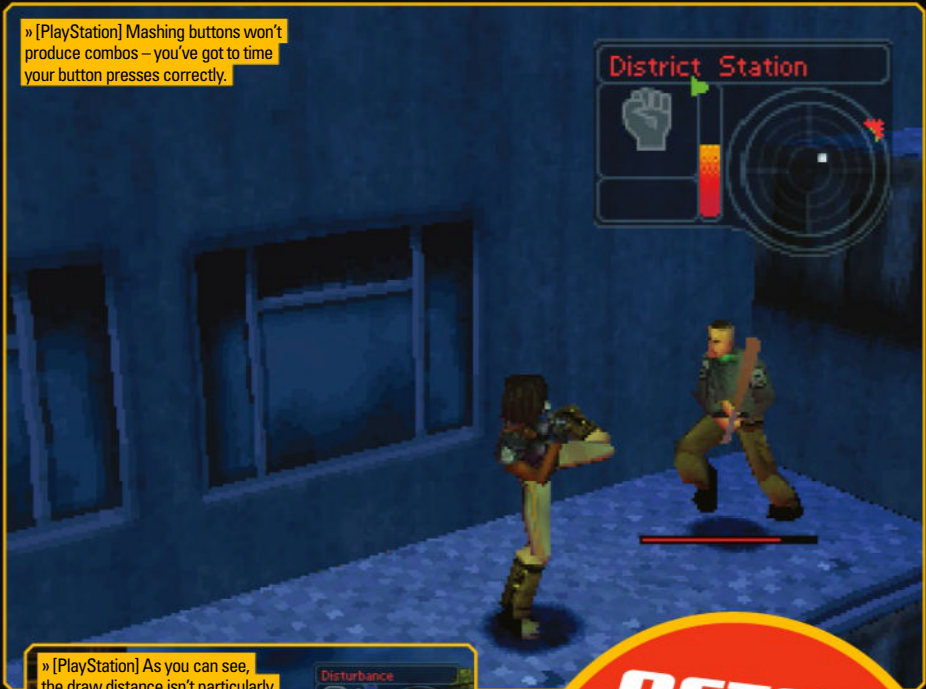
■ DEVELOPER: MUCKY FOOT PRODUCTIONS
■ YEAR: 2000

■ It's amazing to think how quickly 3D game design developed over the course of the PlayStation's life, and *Urban Chaos* is a great example of just how ambitious things could get. Playing as rookie cop D'arci Stern, you navigate small open-city environments and try to bring justice to the streets – initially through low-level interventions like recovering illegal firearms and arresting muggers, before the game's story really opens up later on.

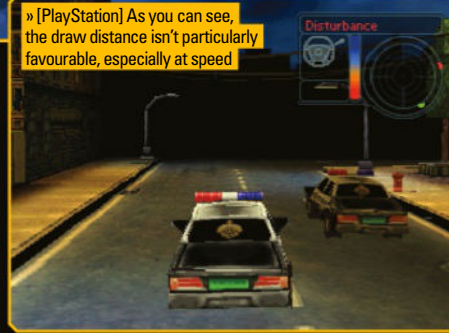
D'arci can drive around the city and has plenty of physical capabilities too, as she can scale fences and slide down wires just as well as she engages in hand-to-hand combat. However, what's particularly compelling about *Urban Chaos* is the mission structure – events develop naturally, as you might receive a distress call on your way to an incident, or get a report of a nearby mugging. What's more, there's real freedom to tackle missions in your own preferred way.

Unfortunately, the forward-thinking aspects of *Urban Chaos* are undercut somewhat by its limitations, and it's a divisive game as a result. There are some very ugly character models, the draw distance is limited and the controls feel a little awkward, particularly when it comes to combat. If you generally favour vision over execution, you'll find a lot to love here.

» [PlayStation] Mashing buttons won't produce combos – you've got to time your button presses correctly.



» [PlayStation] As you can see, the draw distance isn't particularly favourable, especially at speed



**RETRO
STINKER**
» IZNOGOURD

■ MICROIDS ■ 1998

■ This simplistic 2D platformer, starring *Asterix* co-creator René Goscinny's titular character, more than lives up to its name – it really is no good at all.



» OMEGA BOOST

■ DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL
■ YEAR: 1999

■ Pilot a mech and blow stuff up in this rail shooter from the developers of *Gran Turismo*. The 3D action threatens to overwhelm at first, but once you've learned to use the scan button to automatically face targets, it becomes quite manageable. *Omega Boost* lives up to its developer's reputation for visually spectacular games, but it's a shorter and leaner experience than you might expect.



» ROGUE TRIP: VACATION 2012

■ DEVELOPER: SINGLETRAC
■ YEAR: 1998

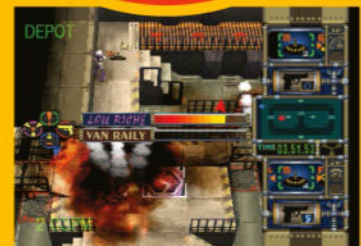
■ More vehicular combat from the team behind the first two *Twisted Metal* games. Nobody can afford package holidays in the dystopian future year of 2012, so you compete with other auto-mercenaries to drive risk-taking tourists to photo spots for cash. Spend that on weapon upgrades and car repairs to help you blow away the competition and make the city yours.



» ROSCO MCQUEEN

■ DEVELOPER: SLIPPERY SNAKE STUDIOS
■ YEAR: 1997

■ When a fire breaks out, cheesy cartoon firefighter Rosco McQueen is the man for the job of evacuating those in danger, putting out fires and smashing evil robots with his axe. This game arrived in Europe a year before its American debut, and reviews were kinder here as a result. It's no *Burning Rangers* and it's a bit simple, but younger players may enjoy Rosco McQueen's adventures.



» TRAP RUNNER

■ DEVELOPER: RACDYM
■ YEAR: 1998

■ While *Trap Runner* allows you to take the direct approach and punch or shoot your adversaries, the name of the game is laying traps for the enemy. You can place mines, pitfalls and more all over the top-down arenas, in an attempt to eliminate the opposition. If you've always liked the concept of *Bomberman* but found it a little indirect and slow, try this out.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



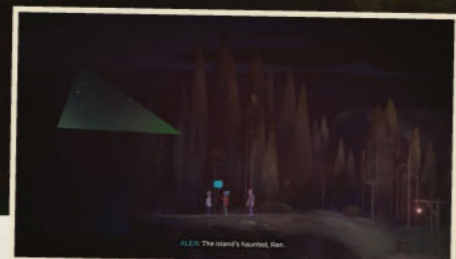
Info

- » **System:** PC, Mac, Linux, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, iOS, Android
- » **Year:** 2016
- » **Publisher:** Night School Studio/Netflix
- » **Developer:** Night School Studio
- » **Key People:** Adam Hines, Sean Krankel, Heather Gross, Andrew Rohrmann

Go Deeper

- » The 2023 release of *Oxenfree's* sequel, *Lost Signals*, saw new radio transmissions patched into the original game. These mysterious messages are the voices of the newer title's cultish villains, Parentage.
- » While it was nominated for several prestigious industry awards, including at the BAFTAs and Golden Joysticks, *Oxenfree* only won one – for Excellence In Visual Art at the 2016 IGF Awards.

» [Switch] Alex and Clarissa have a frosty relationship, which comes through when they're on the screen together.



» [Switch] Ghosts... let's just go with ghosts.

A coming-of-age drama about a group of teens wracked with personal-life anxieties, wrapped around a skin-tingling, blood-chilling ghost story, *Oxenfree* is a game that demands close attention on a first and narrative-twisting second playthrough

Words by Mike Diver

OXENFREE

THE BACKGROUND

Oxenfree is the debut from Night School Studio, founded in 2014 by ex-Telltale Games writer and graphic novelist Adam Hines (*The Wolf Among Us*, *Tales From The Borderlands*) and his cousin Sean Krankel, formerly of Disney Interactive. A graphic adventure with (direct-driven) point-and-click-style gameplay and wonderfully organic dialogue interactions, it's up there alongside the best the genre has to offer.

Speaking to Vice in 2015, prior to *Oxenfree's* launch, Krankel discussed how he and Hines were inspired by *Poltergeist*, for its general spookiness and how the Steven Spielberg-penned picture uses communication as a way to generate genuine discomfort. The game's makers – including lead artist Heather Gross and composer Andrew Rohrmann (aka scntfc) – also took cues from another cinematic classic, *Stand By Me*, helping to shape the interactions between

the five main characters, young adults facing up to unsettling changes in their regular lives.

Erin Yvette and Gavin Hammon play protagonist Alex and her new stepbrother Jonas. Both arrived with considerable experience, which was essential to Hines and Krankel as, said the latter in 2015, "These characters go through some pretty crazy stuff," so they needed to have range. But "crazy stuff" is underselling just how out there *Oxenfree* can get, and downplaying the gravity of the situation its cast finds itself in.

THE GAME

Oxenfree begins with Alex, her friend Ren and Jonas taking a ferry to Edwards Island. They're looking forward to an unsupervised night of underage drinking on the beach, and hope to meet many more revellers; but the only others to have made the journey are Clarissa, who once dated



» [Switch] There's a bunker on Edwards Island – but getting inside it won't be easy.



» [Switch] The first time Alex opens a rift is an unsettling moment – and they don't get any more comfortable.

Things of note

PLAY IT AGAIN

Oxenfree's essential New Game Plus option restructures the narrative, adding new story beats that stretch across time, changing the player's understanding of what's really happening.



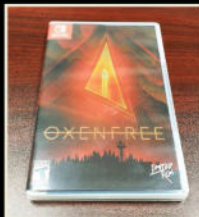
AN ARG ADVENTURE

The small anomalies are call signs relating to an alternate reality game that ran in 2016, resulting in the discovery of a one-of-a-kind music box on Bainbridge Island, WA.



LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Primarily distributed digitally, *Oxenfree* received physical versions via Limited Run Games, albeit only for Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 4. Unsurprisingly, both are long sold out.



UNSETTLING THE SCORE

Oxenfree's eerie soundtrack is composed by Andrew Rohrmann, who used Forties radios and tape players during the recording process to give it an uneasy feel.



ANIMATED INSPIRATION

Lead artist Heather Gross was inspired by the 2014 animated movie *Song Of The Sea*, creating a watercolour look that's both 2D and 3D at once.



Alex's late brother Michael, and Nona, who Ren has a crush on. Spirits are dampened, but the disappointment of a low turnout is soon forgotten as events accelerate from ill-tempered to terrifying.

The boat ride introduces the basics, from interactable objects marked with a small circle to the dialogue system, where prompts appear above Alex's head – on a controller, one simply presses the corresponding face button (left, top centre, or right – the bottom button is for those environmental cues). Alex can often select a reply before another character finishes their sentence, allowing for free-flowing conversations where you never overthink things (not answering is another option – the choices simply fade away). The decisions you make do impact the ending, albeit without explicitly telling you, so bear that in mind for repeat plays – shape a different Alex, see a different outcome.

It's how Alex's companions on this island adventure regard her which determines who finishes the story in a happy place, or even makes it back to the mainland. And yet that's not the actual end of *Oxenfree* – without going too deeply into spoiler territory, time itself isn't in the best of health, and Alex is at the centre of a phenomenon that's going to prove particularly tricky to escape. What is exceptionally easy, however, is awakening the antagonists of the game – ghosts, of a kind, who want to live again by possessing the young visitors. This they manage for brief periods, their victims' eyes glowing red – how successful they ultimately are, though, again comes down to Alex's choices at key moments.

These ghosts make their entrance courtesy of another core mechanic. Alex carries a radio with her at all times, using it to tune into strange signals unique to the island, such as eerie mutterings and snippets of old songs. And then there are the anomalies she can

activate. These can be small, marked by stacks of stones (see the Things Of Note panel), or larger, scarier tears in the fabric of reality. When prompted, Alex opens triangular windows into a dimension where these 'ghosts' have been stranded since a tragic accident befell them. Accompanied by exceptional sound design, every encounter with one of these rifts is riveting, the fractured voices from the other side capable of delivering palpable chills.

As well as action on the island, players will also see flashbacks to Alex's brother. Maybe, just maybe, there's a way to change the past and create a better present. And the more one looks into *Oxenfree*, gathers its collectibles and analyses its setting, the deeper and wider it becomes. This is much more than a bunch of kids getting creeped out by some disembodied spooks – it's a rabbit hole of rich world building which becomes even more satisfying to unpick on a New Game Plus replay and forms the fascinating foundations of a much-recommended sequel.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Oxenfree gets under the skin like few other graphic adventures. It's not a horror game per se, but its disquieting atmosphere and perilous plot twists can leave you queasier than any jump-scare-laden alternative. It is an exemplary example of its genre, setting relatable characters in remarkable scenarios, and its art style ensures it shouldn't ever look dated.

That the game is available across myriad platforms makes it hugely accessible – and due to Netflix's acquisition of Night School in 2021, it's playable as part of that streaming service's subscription (likewise its sequel). A TV adaptation may also materialise, which should only elevate *Oxenfree's* profile and spread its beguiling menace to wider audiences. ✱



THE MAKING OF

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
MIDWAY, SONY
INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:**
RADICAL
ENTERTAINMENT
- » **PLATFORM:**
PLAYSTATION
- » **RELEASED:**
2000
- » **GENRE:**
BEAT-'EM-UP/
PLATFORMER



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC

RELEASED: 2003

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

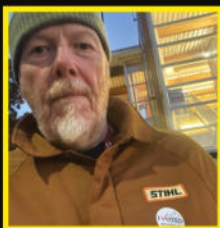
PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PSP

RELEASED: 2005

THE WORLD IS YOURS

PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX, PC, WII

RELEASED: 2006



IAN VERCHERE

» Ian was one of the founders and longtime creative director of Radical Entertainment, and the original lead designer of *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster*. After stints at Electronic Arts and Roadhouse Interactive, he founded Session Games in 2016, where he serves as CEO.

JACKIE CHAN STUNTMASTER





» [PlayStation] All the animation was performed by Jackie Chan himself using motion-capture technology.



» [PlayStation] Collectable items provide additional energy and give Jackie more 'Takes'.

MOST GAMES WITH A REAL PERSON'S NAME IN THE TITLE HAVE ACTUALLY VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH THEM. BUT THERE ARE SOME STARS WHOSE INFLUENCE ON A GAME GOES FAR BEYOND THEIR FACE AND VOICE. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE IS THE GREAT ACTION GOD HIMSELF: JACKIE CHAN

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

For decades, the name Jackie Chan has been synonymous not only with top-notch action, but also with an extra dose of slapstick. So it's no surprise that the name has appeared on a number of game boxes over the last 40 years already (see the Rumble In The Box panel for more on that) – but none bigger than *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster*.

According to the game's original developer Ian Verchere, *Stuntmaster* was planned as a Jackie Chan game from the very beginning, "I've always been a huge fan of Jackie's films, and there are scenes from *Armor Of God II: Operation Condor* that could easily have been taken directly from *Super Mario 64* levels. The pitch for me was simple: replace the Italian plumber with the most famous action movie star in the world. It didn't need to be more complicated than that – make an excellent action platformer that captures the humour and physicality of Jackie Chan."

This idea was met with some scepticism by the management of Radical Entertainment, but Ian soon pulled the ultimate rabbit out of the hat: the man himself! "The process was surprisingly simple: we basically called Jackie Chan up through his management, and the deal for exclusive rights to his animated likeness came together really quickly." Which, according to Ian, wasn't as expensive as you might think, given Jackie's extremely high profile at the time, "I can't say exactly, but it wasn't more than \$500,000." And Jackie was more involved in the game than you might expect – more on that in the Mr Nice Superstar panel.

"I WANTED TO MAKE A GAME THAT WAS BASICALLY SUPER MARIO WITH FIGHTING"
IAN VERCHERE

The game was supposed to be finished in the spring of 1999, but that didn't happen. The next target date was the autumn of that year, and finally the spring of 2000, when it was finally released. The big question is, why did it take so long? "I wanted to make a game that was basically *Super Mario* with fighting, and to focus on the innovative use of an AI 'fight coordinator' to make one versus many fighting feel like the movies," explains Ian on the game's delay. "So sure, punch and kick and get x points. But grab a frozen fish and swing it around as you fall back over a chair and knock out three bad guys, then that's worth 10x points. Since I put the deal and concept together, I had this vision for what the game should be – I could play it in my head. In this case

though, it was 'decided' that everyone's creative input should be considered, even this one 'executive producer' who didn't even play games, nor do I think gave two shits about games in general. So, you end up with a game designed by a 'committee', and that never works. To be clear – you have to collaborate to make a great game; you need to work directly with artists, programmers, audio/composers, a good production team, QA etc. What you don't need though are a bunch of people making creative decisions that detract from the vision, and create confusion with the dev team. Games are like films in that sense – you can't have ten directors telling everyone what to do."

Ian was also not particularly interested in giving the game an elaborate storyline. "From a production perspective, the



MR NICE SUPERSTAR

HOW STUNTMASTER BECAME A TRUE JACKIE CHAN GAME

■ After Radical Entertainment made the deal with Jackie Chan, he visited Futurelight Studios in Santa Monica for two days in the spring of 1998 to contribute to the game. According to Ian, he was accompanied by two key members of his Jackie Chan Stunt Team: Ken Lo and Andy Chang. The two of them first tested on each other if the fight moves the development team had in mind were actually safe to perform. Once that was sorted out, Jackie was put into an elaborate motion-capture suit to record all the moves: punches, kicks, flips, rolls, drunken boxing staggers – everything!

Ian has only the best memories of that time, "I've kept very few souvenirs of my 30 years in games, but one I have is an autographed CD for PS dev kits, 'Dear Ian, Good idea! Jackie.' As I recall, he had some doubts about mocap, but once he realised that his actions and skills were being basically 'immortalised' at the peak of his physical abilities, he was great."

Of course, a promotional video was also made of all of it, which you can watch in the game if you collect all the gold dragons and finish the Shaolin temple bonus level. In the same video, Jackie also mentions that he very much likes playing videogames. Although he admits to being more of an old-school arcade gamer – even back then he found modern games too complicated to play.





» [PlayStation] The game is full of the typical Jackie Chan slapstick humour, especially in the occasional real-time cutscene.



» [PlayStation] Jackie has some very acrobatic moves. You know the man.



» [PlayStation] As in his films, Jackie uses some very crazy everyday objects as weapons in *Stuntmaster*—like this giant fish.

► timing was also impacted by something else I didn't agree with: the overlay of some kind of narrative or overarching story to the game," he says. "Frankly, I didn't agree – I wanted it to be more arcade-like, and to reward the player for creativity in using background objects to defeat waves of attackers as in *Drunken Master II*. The emphasis on cutscenes and narrative was a mistake, and that time could have been spent on polishing physics, improving framerate etc."

Ultimately, *Stuntmaster* revolves around Jackie's uncle being kidnapped by bad guys and Jackie (who, as in many of his films, is simply called Jackie in the game) having to free him. And how do you do that? By beating up everyone in your path, of course. You have a remarkably varied combat system at your disposal: standard punches and kicks that can be combined into different combos, chargeable super attacks, throws, dodges and counters. And of course, lots of seemingly harmless everyday objects that become weapons in Jackie's hands: a big fish, boxes, tables,

brooms, flowerpots, exhaust pipes, lifebuoys, plungers and soup pots make for a lot of fun. Unfortunately they are only there for fun – they deal no additional damage and disappear again after just a few hits.

The enemies are the usual stereotypes from martial arts films: standard goons of various sizes, shapes and colours who utter phrases like, "I wanna be on your side," during the fights. There are ninjas and even a kind of zombie in the sewers. At the end of each world, of course, there is a boss waiting to be beaten: a fat chef, a boxing clown with a supporting mime, or the Seventies dancer Disco Danny are quite wacky, but sadly not much of a challenge. Which is even true of the final villain, the uncle-kidnapper and Steven Seagal wannabe Dante.

In addition to the objects that can be used as weapons, there are also helpful items: a bowl of rice, a carton of milk and a box of noodles will give you additional energy, while clapper boards will give you extra lives (or Extra Takes). And then there are the dragon icons: ten per level, some of

"THE DEAL WITH JACKIE CAME TOGETHER REALLY QUICKLY, THE PROCESS WAS SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE!"
IAN VERCHERE

them extremely well hidden. Collect them all in a level and you get a golden dragon. Collect 15 of those and you receive a grey and black bonus costume, which looks classier than Jackie's usual jeans and T-Shirt combo

and is very reminiscent of his outfit in the film *Drunken Master*. Also, a bonus level becomes available, in which you fight some very challenging opponents in a Shaolin temple to unlock a nearly five-minute making-of film in which Jackie himself talks about the making of his game.

The game's main problem is not the combat system – it's the jumping. In fact, the game could well have been subtitled *Jumpmaster*. Jackie jumps from roof to roof, parapet to parapet, awning to awning, platform to platform. He dodges escaping steam, giant blowing fans, exploding barrels, swinging pianos and fire-spewing chimneys, and runs across conveyor belts, and floating platforms. Which wouldn't be a problem in itself if the controls played along. But they don't. Jackie's movements always feel as if he has a thin layer of ice

RUMBLE IN THE BOX

MORE ADVENTURES WITH THE DIGITAL JACKIE

KUNG-FU MASTER

1984

■ When it was originally released in Japan, Irem's game was called *Spartan X* – just like the film starring Jackie, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao that hit the market a few months earlier and became internationally known as *Wheels On Meals*. The game is only loosely based on the original, but is considered to have invented the scrolling beat-'em-up and is a true classic of the genre.



JACKIE CHAN'S ACTION KUNG FU

1990

■ Developed by Now Production, *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu*, also known as the much more simple *Jackie Chan*, first appeared on the NES before being released in an expanded form on the PC-Engine the following year. *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu* is a really nice 2D platformer with a simple combat system and lots of fun to play.



THE KUNG-FU MASTER JACKIE CHAN

1995

■ This arcade-only brawler was graphically very similar to *Mortal Kombat*, although without any ripped-out spines. Also there was no playable Jackie Chan in the first version, you only met him as a boss. This was slightly overcorrected the same year with an upgrade called *Jackie Chan In Fists Of Fire*, which contained three playable Jackie variants.



THE MAKING OF: JACKIE CHAN STUNTMASTER



» [PlayStation] The level select screen is a 3D courtyard that becomes more and more unlocked as you progress.



» [PlayStation] Some of the dragon extras are very hard to get. Most of the time you only get one attempt to reach them.



» [PlayStation] The game looks quite powerful in motion, some of the attacks have a lot of impact.

under his feet, making precise jumps a test of your frustration thresholds. Nowhere is this more evident than in the final level of the third world, Sewers, where you are constantly jumping from one moving train wagon to another, fighting enemies along the way. It is very likely that this level caused a lot of PlayStation controller-shaped holes in players' walls.

The game consists of fifteen levels in New York, divided into five areas: Chinatown, the sewers, a shipyard, the rooftops of the city – and towards the end you visit a large factory. The structure is always the same: three large levels, finished up with a boss fight. The whole thing was originally supposed to take place in Hong Kong, but was changed to New York late in development. In fact, even Hong Kong was not part of the original design idea. As Ian explains, his *Stuntmaster* was supposed to be a kind of the best-of classic Jackie Chan films. "For me, the game should have been in levels that had more to do with gameplay than story. So, the desert from *Armor Of God*, and the big bar/house from *Drunken Master*

or along the moving train from *Police Story*. I didn't care whether it was New York or Hong Kong. Build for gameplay, not story."

From a graphical point of view, *Stuntmaster* is a quite unusual beast. All of the levels are made up of shaded polygons, with just a hint of texture mapping here and there. There are also a few sprite objects, such as the items, but these are clearly in the minority. The reason for this, according to Ian, is as follows. "Textures take up memory, and when the camera moves around, they begin to look kind of odd. In 3D environments, it's better to light/shade, as ultimately that feels more real as cameras and characters move around." The result is a very unusual mix of styles, without the wobbly textures that were typical for the PlayStation. However, compromises had to be made, and this is particularly evident in the characters: Jackie is just about recognisable as himself, mainly because he moves exactly as we know him from the films. The enemies, on the other hand, are very roughly carved collections of differently coloured blocks.

The action is presented from a slightly angled perspective, with the screen



» [PlayStation] The graphics, which consist mostly of shaded 3D polygons, are not the game's greatest strength. In particular, the very rough characters models leave a lot to be desired.



» [PlayStation] The occasional render movies are kept in the same blocky character look as the actual game.

JACKIE CHAN ADVENTURES

2001

■ *Jackie Chan Adventures* was a five-season animated series released in 2000, centred around Jackie and his, well, adventures. The official game for the series, subtitled *Legend Of The Dark Hand*, debuted on the GBA, and was a competent brawler with a far too youthful looking Jackie. A standalone PS2 version followed in 2004, simply called *Jackie Chan Adventures*.



JACKIE CHAN J-MAT FITNESS

2005

■ Have you ever heard of the XaviXPORT console? It's an obscure Japanese game system that only saw around 20 games in its lifetime – and two of them had Jackie Chan in the name! The more famous one contained a kind of dance mat, designed to motivate you to do aerobic exercises led by Jackie. The other came with boxing gloves.



ARMOURY OF THE GODS

SOME OF THE COOL MOVES JACKIE CAN DO IN STUNTMASTER

WALL JUMPING

■ Jackie can run up most walls. Either to jump off and reach other platforms, or to backflip and attack nearby enemies.



KICKING STUFF AROUND

■ From time to time, there will be massive rolls or bins in the area, just waiting for you to kick them in the direction of oncoming opponents. See them fall like bowling pins!



USING GADGETS

■ As in most of his films, *Stuntmaster* allows Jackie to pick-up all sorts of everyday objects and use them as weapons. Every now and then these things even give him new attacks!



DRUNKEN BOXING

■ Jackie popularised drunken boxing in films such as *Drunken Master*. In *Stuntmaster*, he occasionally finds a bottle of booze to drink from, which makes him wobble around and unleash unpredictable attacks.



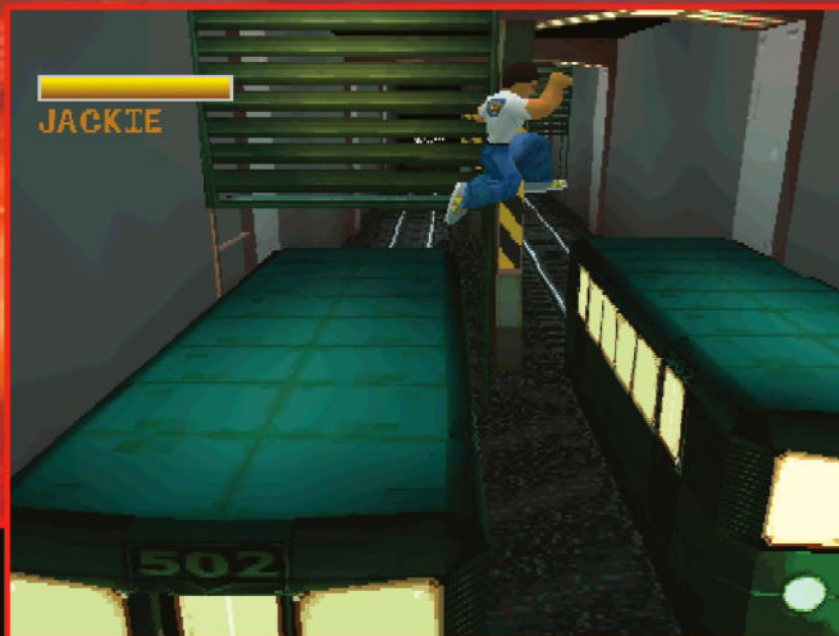
GROUND ATTACKS

■ By pressing R1, Jackie can perform a dive roll at any time, which, when combined with an attack button, results in powerful combos. And if he is knocked down, he can perform a quick get-up attack.



TABLE ROLL

■ Jackie's movie fights are defined by a smooth flow. This is exactly what the game offers too, allowing you to roll over obstacles such as tables or crates to move seamlessly from one bout to the next.



» [PlayStation] *Stuntmaster* is full of sometimes very challenging jumps. The train level in particular is one extremely difficult beast.



» [PlayStation] The game doesn't just scroll horizontally and vertically – Jackie occasionally also runs in and out of the screen.



» [PlayStation] Fights are easy to control, with just a few buttons you keep your opponents at bay.

► scrolling in all directions – horizontally, vertically – Jackie even runs in and out of the screen like *Crash Bandicoot*, for example, when he is being chased by a speeding truck. The camera perspective, however, remains always fixed without any player interference whatsoever. Also, there are no panning shots or smooth scene changes, at least not within the levels. According to Ian, this is another thing that was originally planned differently. "There were a couple of major innovations that ended up in later Radical games, in particular the camera system I specified and built with a couple of amazing programmers, Jack Yee and Jason Dorie. It was way ahead of its time, and enabled us to do some amazing cinematic moments, like seamlessly transition to a crane shot as Jackie climbed a ladder."

But even this idea was eventually discarded. These and many other decisions meant that eventually Ian left his company in frustration in the middle of development. "Ultimately, the game was forced in a direction by an executive producer and one of the Radical owners that I didn't agree with, and I left Radical before *Stuntmaster* was released to re-join EA and work on being a creative producer for *SSX Tricky* and *NBA Street V2*."

Jackie Chan Stuntmaster, which was completed without him, received a mixed reception from the gaming press: GameSpot gave it 67 points, IGN 8/10, and the *Official US PlayStation Magazine* 3.5/5, which called it, "A refreshing bit of old-school action." David Kushner (of *Masters Of Doom* fame) gave it a B grade in his review for *Entertainment Weekly* and said, "*Stuntmaster's* a lot like a Chan flick: fast on action, short on story. In a videogame, at least, this formula works."

Stuntmaster sold quite well, but according to Ian, it wasn't a smash success. Also it was never allowed to leave the PlayStation,





» [PlayStation] There aren't that many different opponents, but they give Jackie a good fight.



» [PlayStation] You usually fight against several opponents at the same time, but always in a family friendly way. As in most Jackie Chan films, there is no blood in the game.

even though a port to Dreamcast and Windows PCs would have made sense. According to Ian, there were several reasons why this didn't happen, "Licensing is the main reason. There was a termination date on the agreement with Jackie. And, it's also a question for Midway or Sony as well, not so much the developer in this case. You need money from a publisher to port to different platforms, so that decision was not ours."

As a result, it is no longer possible to buy *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster* officially in any digital game store. Which is a shame, because for all its flaws, this is a very interesting game that doesn't just use its star superficially, but is 100% centred around him. The fights are fun, especially with the many, sometimes very silly things you can use as weapons – a solid fish hit in particular leaves a suitably satisfying FLAP! in the enemy's face. At its best, *Stuntmaster* has a really nice flow of fights, slapstick and acrobatics that comes pretty close to Jackie's films.

"IT'S HARD FOR ME TO LOOK BACK AT STUNTMASTER WITHOUT THINKING OF THE LOST OPPORTUNITY"
IAN VERCHERE

Which is all the more unfortunate when you hear from Ian about the kind of game it was originally intended to be, and how frustrating it is for him to this day to have his vision of a true Jackie Chan homage hacked to pieces. "The development process turned into design by executive committee, and some execs with no real experience in game design or production were forcing some bad choices on the team. In my 30 years in the game industry, I've never had a project just get scooped away from me like that. So overall, it was a bad experience for me. It was my original concept, I reached out to Jackie and put together the exclusive deal with my associate Paul Tremblay, got the project going, got the key tools for success specced out, and then suddenly there were too many cooks. To be clear though, the dev team themselves were an awesome group of great people who have moved on to do some amazing things. But it's really hard for me to look back at the experience without thinking of the lost opportunity." ✱



» [PlayStation] Collect all the golden dragons to unlock a short but intense bonus level for Jackie, including a matching outfit.



» [PlayStation] The boss fights are well presented and sometimes very funny. Unfortunately, they don't offer much of a challenge.



Wii Balance Board

» PLATFORM: Wii » YEAR: 2007 » COST: £69.99 (launch, with Wii Fit), £5+ (today, boxed), £2+ (today, unboxed)

During the era of the DS and Wii, Nintendo didn't just want to sell games consoles – it wanted to sell the dream that self-improvement could be fun, whether you were exercising your mind in *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* or your body with *Wii Sports*. The Wii Balance Board was key to the next step of that drive. The board, which takes four AA batteries to connect to the Wii wirelessly, uses four sensors to measure your weight, as well as determining your balance by gauging where your weight is distributed on the board.

The Wii Balance Board was initially packaged with the exercise-themed minigame collection *Wii Fit*, and later with the improved *Wii Fit Plus* in 2009. Both games were huge hits, resulting in almost 42 million Wii Balance Boards sold by January 2012. Over 100 compatible games were released for the device, many of which are also themed around fitness. However, games such as *Marbles! Balance Challenge*, *Punch-Out!!*, *Skate It*, *Super Monkey Ball: Step & Roll* and *Tetris Party Deluxe* also support the peripheral, so it's worth some investigation. *

Wii Balance Board fact

■ In 2013, Ithaca Ventures and Ithaca Development sued Nintendo for patent infringement over the Wii Balance Board. A German court ruled against Ithaca in 2015, and a US lawsuit was subsequently dismissed.

ESSENTIAL GAME

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING: ROAD TRIP

You expected *Wii Fit Plus*, didn't you? Well, we're rather more keen on the traditional games for the Wii Balance Board, and a snowboarding game is a natural fit. This version of the game was developed specifically for the Wii and clearly takes after the *SSX* games, employing a pleasantly cartoonish art style and a great licensed soundtrack. Though you can play it with regular controllers, the game was praised in contemporary reviews for its enjoyable integration of the Wii Balance Board, so even motion-control sceptics may be won over.



Project

ULTIMATE GUIDE

OF ALL THE GAMES THAT LAUNCHED WITH THE NINTENDO DS, NONE WERE AS INVENTIVE, CHARMING, OR OVERLOOKED AS PROJECT RUB. TWENTY YEARS LATER, SONIC TEAM'S DS DEBUT REMAINS ONE OF THE SYSTEM'S MOST ENJOYABLE AND ENDEARING GAMES

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO

Living as we do in a time when virtually everyone has a touch-sensitive electronic device in their pocket, it's easy to forget just how unusual and bold the Nintendo DS was when it debuted. Given Nintendo's incredible recent success, it's also easy to forget just how important its quirky dual-screened, touch-sensitive handheld console was to the brand's survival. If we think about it, the DS could arguably be considered as one of the most important devices in the history of Mario's makers.

It arrived at a time when Nintendo's then-current home console, the GameCube, was performing worse than any previous console in the company's history. To most game-industry observers, it looked like Nintendo was in big trouble. And then the DS showed up, proceeded to sell 154 million units in its lifecycle, and became the second-most successful videogame system of all time. This, along with the Wii, reversed the trend of sluggish Nintendo sales, and re-cemented the brand as a leader of innovative concepts in gaming.

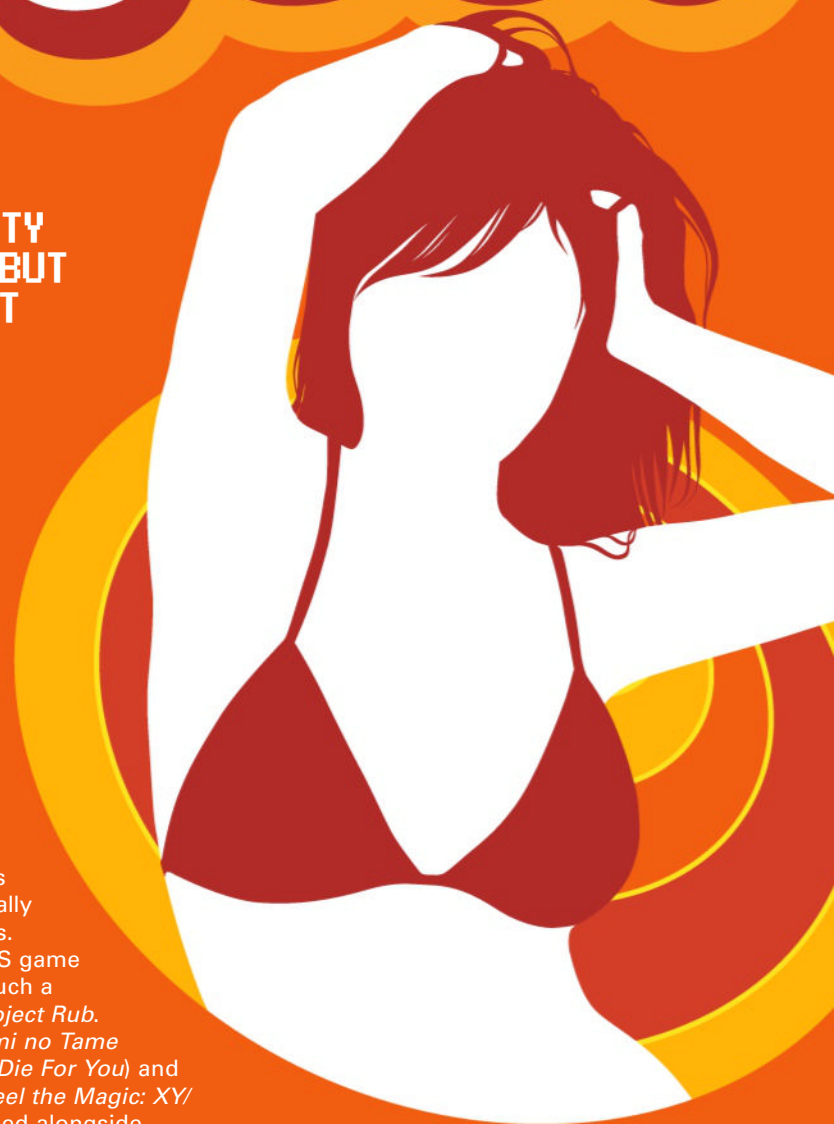
But when the DS launched in 2004, none of this was a foregone conclusion. Two screens? Where are we supposed to look? A weird, little stylus? What is this, a Palm Pilot? Indeed, pundits of the time called the DS Nintendo's "worst idea ever", with others dramatically heralding it as the company's "death knell". But then came the games.

Overnight, the Nintendo DS became a machine of unique concepts, hosting wildly imaginative games, games which

reminded everyone of what has always made videogames special and different from other forms of entertainment: that is, interaction. Good games affect us through our ability to affect them. They let us experience stories through novel technology, and the novel technology of the Nintendo DS allowed us for the first time to literally touch these experiences.

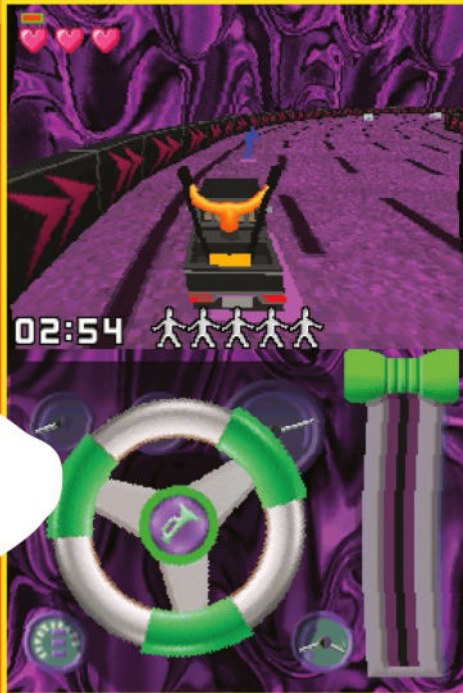
The first Nintendo DS game which accomplished such a miracle was Sega's *Project Rub*. Known in Japan as *Kimi no Tame nara Shineru* (I Would Die For You) and in North America as *Feel the Magic: XY/XX*, *Project Rub* launched alongside the DS in all territories, and of all the system's launch line-up, it was the game which most effectively leveraged the new console's hardware. Twenty years later, it remains a delightfully honest and addictively fun videogame.

Project Rub is most neatly described as a minigame compilation in which wild and nonsensical minigames are loosely held together by an overarching plot. People who have played Polygon Magic's PlayStation cult classic *Incredible Crisis*, or even the more mainstream *WarioWare* ►

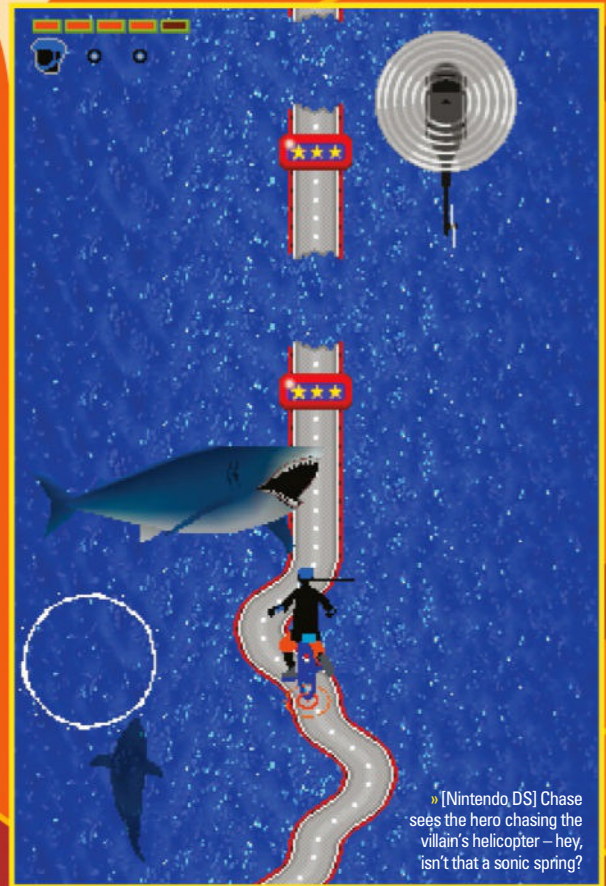


"TWO SCREENS? WHERE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO LOOK? A WEIRD, LITTLE STYLUS? WHAT IS THIS, A PALM PILOT?"

Rub



» [Nintendo DS] When the hero is poisoned, nightmare missions present twisted imaginings of previous boss fights."



» [Nintendo DS] Chase sees the hero chasing the villain's helicopter – hey, isn't that a sonic spring?



The Rub Rabbits

CAN LOVE STRIKE THE DS TWICE?

■ Sega followed *Project Rub* with a prequel one year later, called *The Rub Rabbits!* It followed much the same formula as the original but added a number of new features and gameplay mechanics, including minigames which required that players hold the DS in certain orientations and local multiplayer.

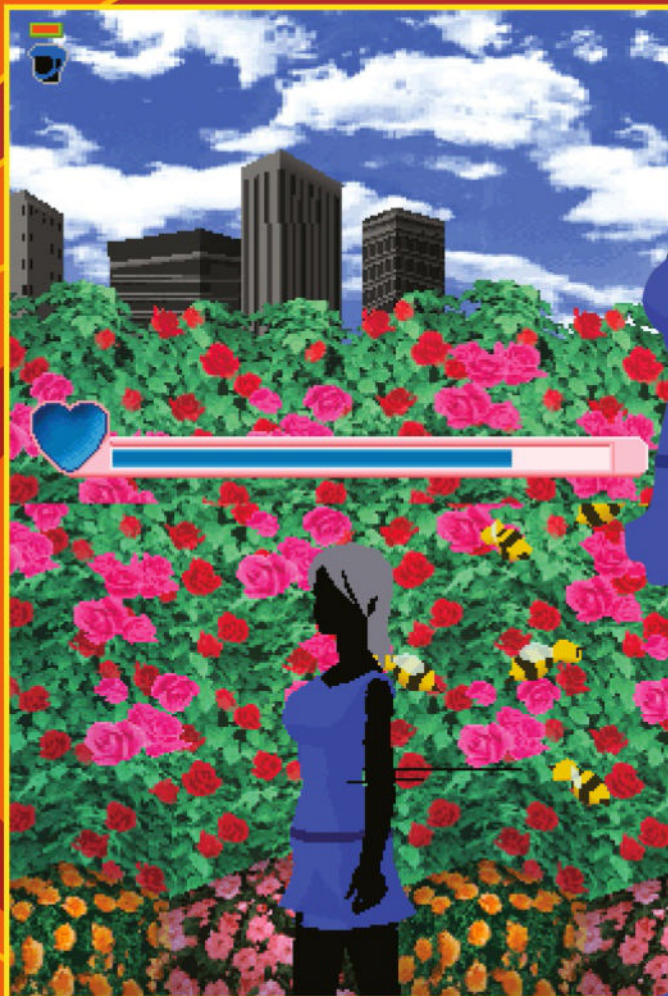
Known in Japan as *Where Do Babies Come From?*, *The Rub Rabbits!* tasks the player with not only winning the affections of the girl the hero loves, but of also repelling the unwanted advances of a second (and quite terrifying) girl. The presentation is similar to the first game, though a bit more polished, and the gameplay has evolved slightly, too, showcasing greater variety across its 37 minigames.

The Rub Rabbits! was received with less enthusiasm than its predecessor, which is perhaps less a reflection on the game itself and more down to the fact that, just one year later, the innovations that were so unique at the launch of the Nintendo DS had since become commonplace. Played today, *The Rub Rabbits!* is as inventive and interesting as any of the best DS games. As charming as the original, yet bigger and better, it's simply more of a very good thing.



» The follow-up to *Project Rub*, *The Rub Rabbits!* features more of the silly antics that made the original so special.





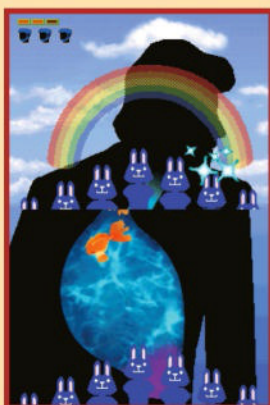
» [Nintendo DS] Simpler minigames involve a pleasant walk and holding hands. Just watch out for bees.



» [Nintendo DS] The Rub Rabbits instruct the hero before each and every minigame.

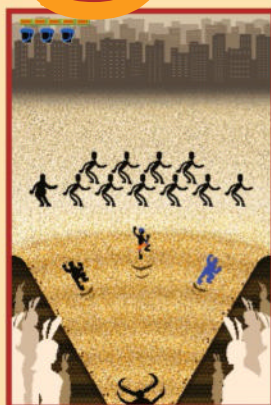
Minigame Mania

SOME FAVOURITES FROM PROJECT RUB'S 27-ISH MINIGAMES



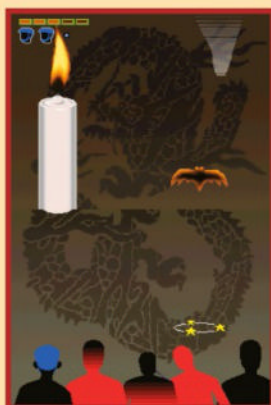
Goldfish

■ Your first taste of *Project Rub*'s madness, Goldfish has you performing the Heimlich manoeuvre on your Nintendo DS. Rub the stylus upwards to force the goldfish out the top hole of some guy's digestive tract. Then rub harder to push the fish toward... well, the other opening.



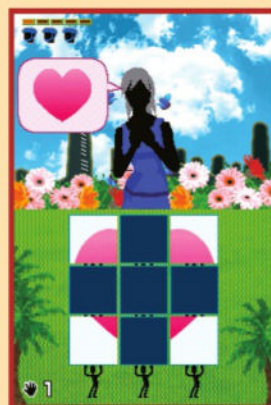
Antlion

■ They can't all be easy, and Antlion is the first really challenging minigame you encounter. Rub Rabbits are sliding down the slippery slopes of an antlion's sand trap. You use the stylus to push them up to safety. It's a nightmare on Hard and Hell modes.



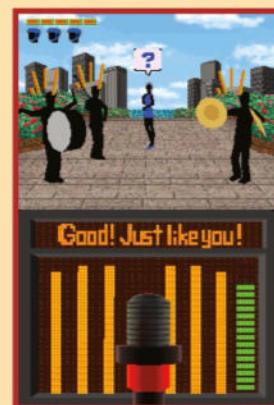
Candle

■ Ever have that nightmare where enormous floating haunted candles are bearing down on you relentlessly as you try to blow them out? No? Well, you might after playing *Project Rub*. The game ingeniously uses the DS microphone to hear when you're blowing.



Sign

■ Sign is as close to a puzzle game as the minigames in *Project Rub* get. By clicking one panel of a multi-panel image, you flip the adjacent panels. The goal is to flip the panels within a set number of moves to create a complete image. It can be quite tricky sometimes.



Microphone

■ The minigame which will make you seem insane on a bus. In Microphone, you have to shout to get the attention of the girl in the distance. The difficulty comes when there's ever-increasing numbers of marching band members crowding you out. Time to get loud!

► games will have an easy starting reference. But *Project Rub* differs from these games in important ways; it's not as silly as *WarioWare*, nor is it as janky as *Incredible Crisis*. *Project Rub*'s gameplay is tight and refined, and its story, though silly at times, is heartfelt and artfully executed.

"PROJECT RUB'S GAMEPLAY IS TIGHT AND REFINED, AND ITS STORY, THOUGH SILLY AT TIMES, IS HEARTFELT AND ARTFULLY EXECUTED"

The plot of *Project Rub* is all about love, persistence and fate. The protagonist is a young man who finds himself suddenly entranced by a beautiful woman as she strolls past him on the street. It's love at first sight. At least, it is for him. She, on the other hand, is politely disinterested. And this is when the Rub Rabbits step in. These observant, romantic pals are dressed in rabbit suits and arrive to help the man (and the player) win the girl's affection. Unfortunately, they don't seem to have much luck either.

For example, as the game begins, you see a comic-style cutscene. The girl passes the protagonist on the street, he falls in love, she continues on, and your hero is left behind to wallow in his ineffectual

self-pity. The Rub Rabbits step up and hand you a fishbowl, complete with a goldfish, presumably as an ice-breaking gift for the girl who is diminishing into the distance. It's just then that a rushing pedestrian bumps

into the hero, sending the bowl flying and the suddenly airborne goldfish to plummet into the pedestrian's open mouth, down the hatch, and into his stomach. Just like that, you're plunged into your first minigame.

The aptly titled Goldfish demands that you massage the contents of the panicking pedestrian's stomach upward until all the goldfish are, ahem, expelled. Once done, it's on to the next slapstick cutscene, the next minigame, and on and on.

One moment you're tasked with plucking scorpions off your would-be girlfriend's back, the next you're unicycling across skyscraper scaffolding, or building a fire on a desert island, or clearing mines from the path of an onrushing shopping cart or shattering the Rub Rabbits like bowling pins, the hero somehow transfigured into an actual bowling ball.



► [Nintendo DS] A flashback sequence hints at a deeper connection, lost in time...



Dance

■ After becoming shipwrecked on a desert island (it makes sense in the story), the hero builds a fire to keep warm. For some reason, the two start dancing, and you're now playing *Space Channel 5*. Match the girl's rhythm and moves to stay warm and happy.



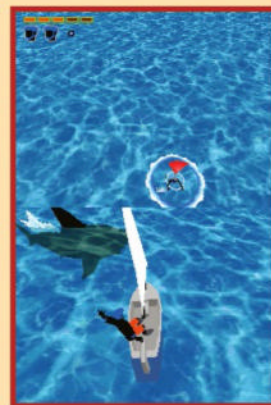
Plants

■ One of the longer and more involved boss fights, Plants pits the hero against a nightmare ivy with tentacular vines and razor-sharp teeth. Use a torch to light the vines on fire at the right moments and toss firesticks into the plant's mouth when it opens.



Snake

■ When the hero is devoured by an enormous anaconda, it's up to you to guide him to freedom. Use the stylus to swim the hero upstream while avoiding the snake's powerful digestive enzymes, which ricochet back and forth. Get to the mouth and leap to safety.



Yacht

■ Another game which inventively utilises the DS' microphone, Yacht requires you to blow a small sailboat across the ocean to rescue the hero's favourite girl, who fell overboard. It's easy at first, but later stages introduce obstacles such as woman-eating sharks.



Magic Touch

■ The most important minigame of all. In Magic Touch you must administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Press the heart and blow at the right times to bring your love back to life. And watch out for the actual grim reaper, who must be fended off with the stylus.



► There are antlions attacking your friends, sharks circling your floating lady, killer plants with enormous metal teeth and tentacular, thorny vines. One moment you're dancing to a beat a la *Space Channel 5* (*Project Rub*'s director Takumi Yoshinaga was story director for the Dreamcast rhythm game), and a few moments later you've been swallowed by an enormous anaconda, tasked with swimming out of its intestines!

The randomness of the minigames keeps things unpredictable, and the gameplay remains varied enough that you don't lose interest by the time you've experienced *Project Rub*'s 25-or-so minigames. You're using the stylus to guide the hero in physical challenges, others involve visual puzzles, or timing and rhythm, while still others require you to use the system's microphone to get your girlfriend's attention, or to blow a sailboat across the ocean, or to extinguish ominous, haunted candles.

Importantly, the minigames are well crafted and play excellently. Never do you experience a frustrating loss on account of

"THE MINIGAMES ARE WELL CRAFTED AND PLAY EXCELLENTLY. NEVER DO WE EXPERIENCE A FRUSTRATING LOSS ON ACCOUNT OF BAD DESIGN"

bad design. If you fail a game, it's because you messed up, not because the game messed up. Furthermore, the game is built in such a way that you never really get stuck. If a minigame is too hard, it's often possible to circumvent it, to gain enough points to progress the story by playing other more manageable minigames.

Every now and then you encounter boss battles, which are longer minigames with unique mechanics. The hero must protect the girl from stampeding bulls, or destroy the getaway car of a romantic rival, or battle a giant mech. It all fits together to create an experience that's always new and fun.

The game's presentation is happily as artful as the gameplay, with characters depicted in a stylish silhouette motif reminiscent of Apple's early 2000's iPod

Dress For Success

YOU WANT ME TO WEAR WHAT?



Maniac Mode

■ By finishing the game, finding and tapping hidden rabbits in cutscenes, and clearing minigames in Memories mode, you're able to unlock 55 different outfit items for the hero's would-be girlfriend to wear. There's everything from a giant chicken suit to costumes referencing other Sega games.



An Eye For Fashion

■ Most of the outfits pair well with certain other pieces of clothing. The tennis skirt goes with tennis shoes, for example, and a nice sports visor. It's also possible to create truly grotesque combinations. Knee-high cactus-green boots with a bathing suit. Fashion police?



Ulala

■ If you start *Project Rub* with certain other Sega games inserted in the Game Boy Advance slot of the Nintendo DS, special outfits are unlocked in Maniac mode. Launch the game with *Space Channel 5* inserted and you unlock Ulala's hair and microphone. Pairs well with gogo boots.



Into Dreams

■ Similarly to Ulala's cameo, launching *Project Rub* with *Chu Chu Rocket* or *Sonic Pinball Party* inserted into the GBA slot will bestow on your hapless love a weird, purple *NiGHTS* head shape. If that's what you're into. No worries. It's all good. No shame.



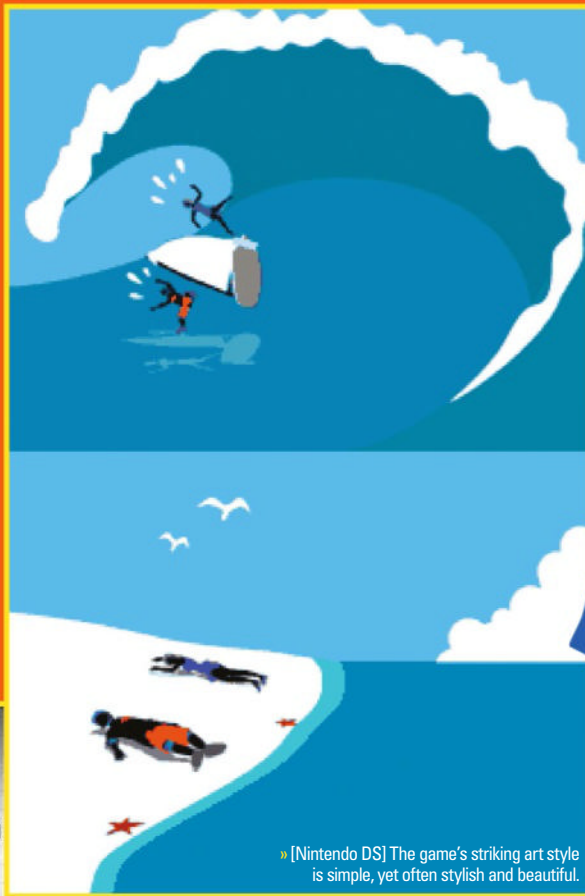
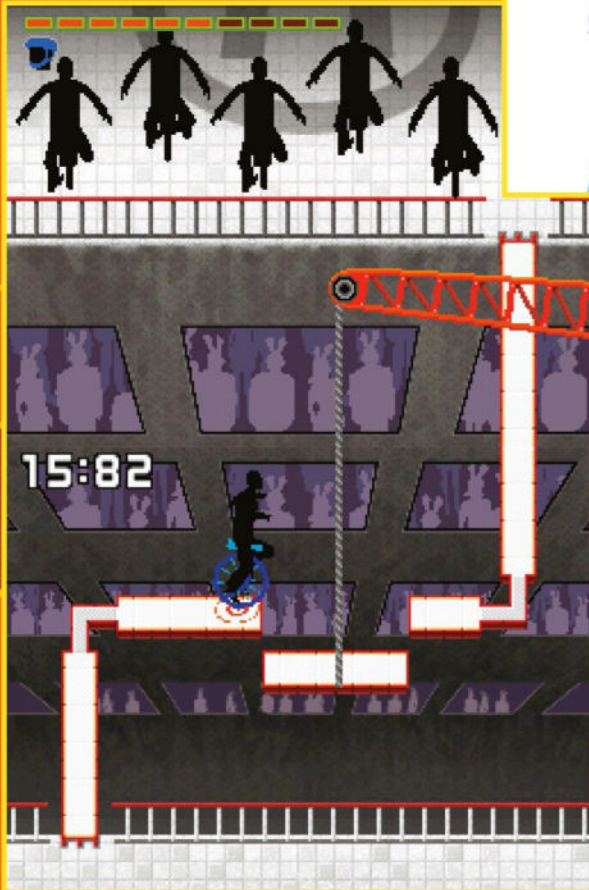
Puyo Puyo

■ Should you launch *Project Rub* with *Puyo Puyo Fever* installed in the DS' GBA slot you will unlock a somewhat ridiculous looking Puyo helmet? Puyo Hair? What should you call this? It looks more like a *Metroid* has eaten the hero's girlfriend's face.

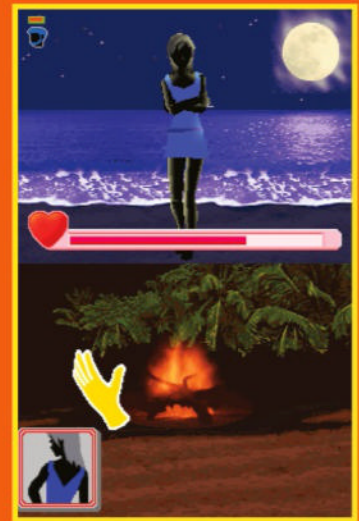
advertising, so chosen by the game's creators to make the story as universally appealing as possible. The music is chaotic, the sound effects unhinged. Every element is done just so, to wonderfully complement every other element.

Where a game like *Project Rub* could have gone very wrong is in its depiction of the relationship between the hero and the girl. A game in which the goal is to 'win' the heart of a girl sounds like a recipe for plenty of second-hand embarrassment at best, with ample potential for offensive schlock. But the game avoids this deftly. It never feels exploitative, or creepy or sexual. It never tries for the cheap joke. The goal of the game, really, is to treat the girl with respect and kindness, to pay attention to her, to simply be a good person to someone whom the hero cares about. A simple idea that, like *Project Rub* itself, feels kind of rare, and really nice. ★

» [Nintendo DS] Memories mode allows us to earn stars and play extended versions of each game.



» [Nintendo DS] The game's striking art style is simple, yet often stylish and beautiful.



» [Nintendo DS] As in all good relationships, it's important to keep the fire burning.



A Woman's Perspective

DELIVERING A STORY FOR EVERYONE

■ In 2006, *Nintendo Power* magazine interviewed *Project Rub* creator Takumi Yoshinaga. Among the topics discussed was the potential difficulties in creating a game to appeal to anyone when the central idea of the game is focussed on something so subjective and personal, ie a romantic relationship mostly presented from a male perspective.

Yoshinaga said, "Our intention was to build a game that never crosses that line and doesn't offend girls by being too sexual in nature. In fact, over half of our team is female. We rely a lot on them to make sure we're delivering a story that really rings true and doesn't cross that boundary."

In an interview with Kikizo.com, *Project Rub*'s producer Yojiro Ogawa cited the team's desire to create a slapstick comedy, rather than a heavy dating game. It is these restrained sensibilities that have allowed *Project Rub* and its prequel to remain playable and relevant today. At no point does *Project Rub* dip into being inappropriate or embarrassing. It's a silly and heartfelt love story for everyone, and this sort of universal appeal only comes from inclusive, nuanced design.



43 mph
12TH place





1:27.0
7 gates

ESPN Extreme Games

A LEGAL WAY TO PUNCH CYCLISTS

» RETROREVIVAL



» PLAYSTATION » 1995 » SONY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS AMERICA
When ESPN first held the Extreme Games event in 1995, the likes of Tony Hawk, Mat Hoffman and Dave Mirra were among the medal winners – names that would later pop up on the covers of PlayStation games.

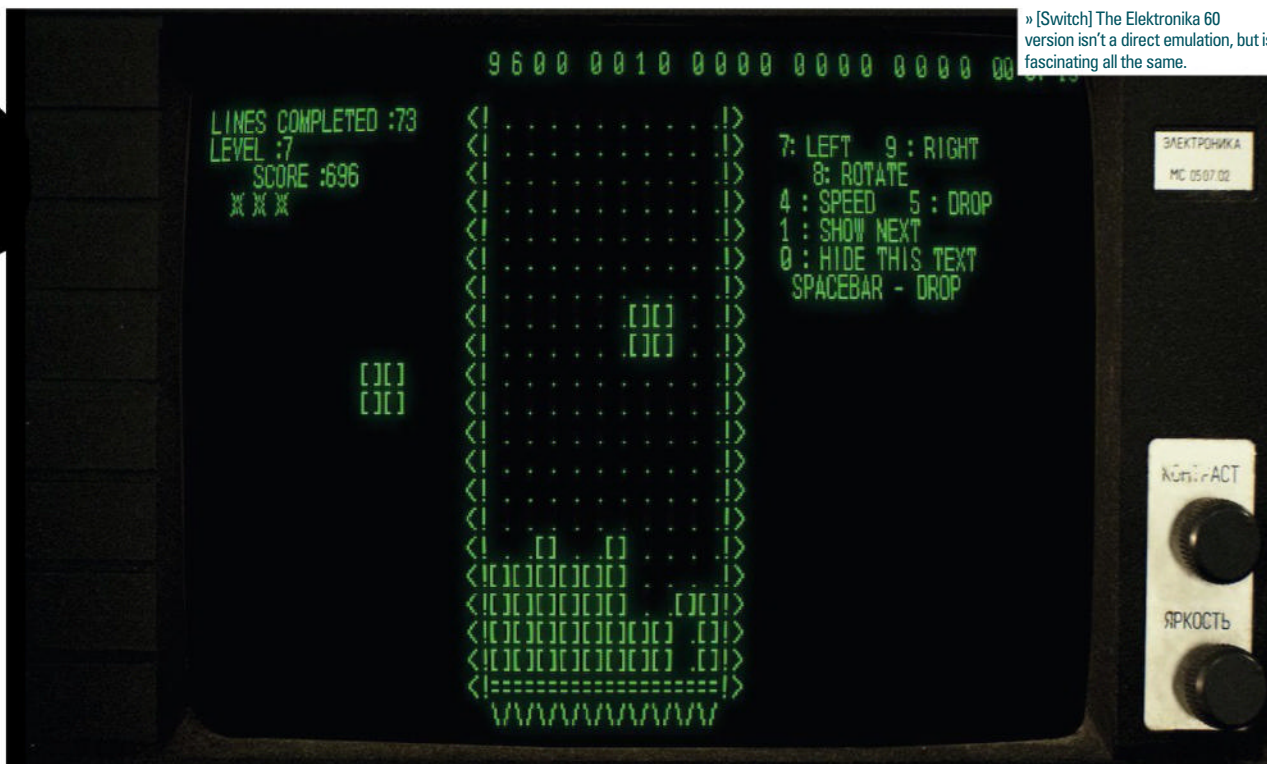
You know what their extreme sports games are like, so it's easy to assume that a licensed game based on that event would play similarly, maybe in a *California Games* multi-sport style. You'd be wrong, though. *ESPN Extreme Games* is a delightfully mid-Nineties racing game with attitude, in the tradition of games like *Skitchin'* and *Road Rash*.

The premise is simple. Sixteen participants take part in a road race using various equipment including mountain bikes, rollerblades and street-luge boards. Courses are littered with obstacles, hazards and ramps, as well as gates that will earn you cash, points, or open up hidden routes depending on their colour. If a rival racer gets in your way, feel free to punch or kick them. Is it an accurate take on the real-life competition? Not at all, neither in structure nor the spirit of friendly competition. Is it fun? Absolutely – it's got that charming early 32-bit blend of sprites and polygons going for it, and it's always fun to kick a luger into a pile of tyres.

If you decide to give this game a go, be warned that it's a tough cookie. The rubber-banding can be absolutely brutal and it's not uncommon to see half-a-dozen racers pass you if you take a spill. The key is learning how to manage speed. You can't accelerate while turning, and constantly holding the accelerate button will actually deplete your stamina and make it easy for opponents to knock you over, so you need to ease off on downhill sections and let gravity do the work for you. Oh, and don't show your rivals any mercy, because they certainly won't be giving you any in return. ★



» Digital Eclipse has brought us something from Russia with love, as Tetris Forever lays out the history of the timeless block puzzle game. We've got more reviews over the page, including Metal Slug Tactics, WipEout: Futurism and much more



» [Switch] The Elektronika 60 version isn't a direct emulation, but is fascinating all the same.

Tetris Forever

T-SPINS A GOOD TALE

INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT REVIEWED:** SWITCH
- » **OTHER FORMATS:** PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £29.50
- » **PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



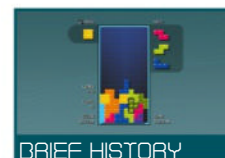
Tetris is a source of endless fascination not only for its notoriously compulsive

gameplay, but for its unusual origin story. The tale of how Alexey Pajitnov created a truly timeless puzzle game, and the legal battles over the rights to bring it from the Soviet Union to the rest of the world, has been told a few times and even inspired a fictionalised movie starring Taron Egerton. Now Digital Eclipse is taking its turn to tell the story

using its excellent interactive documentary format, which takes you through the history of the game with text, images, video footage and playable games as they become relevant.

As well as Alexey Pajitnov and his partner in The Tetris Company Henk Rogers, you'll hear from the likes of former Spectrum Holobyte CEO Gilman Louie, *Tetris Effect* producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi and current president and CEO of The Tetris Company, Maya Rogers. Thanks to Henk's habit of documenting his travels on video, there's plenty of fantastic historical footage here. From big things like his initial trip to Moscow and a visit to Nintendo Of America, right down to evaluating new spins on *Tetris*, there's much to be enjoyed.

Tetris is a broad subject to cover and Digital Eclipse has made the editorial choice to focus primarily on the inside story. While there is some recognition of the wider *Tetris* culture, like a brief section on the Classic Tetris World Championship and a clip of Willis 'Blue Scuti' Gibson's game-ending



BRIEF HISTORY

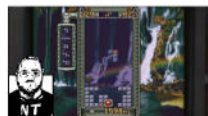
» *Tetris Forever* is the third entry in Digital Eclipse's Gold Master series, following *The Making Of Karateka* and *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story*. These multimedia documentaries about historically important videogames and developers each use an interactive timeline format first seen in *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*, which seeks to produce a cohesive historical narrative by integrating the emulated games and non-game materials typical to retro-gaming compilations. The timeline format was also used in Team17's recent console port of *Worms Armageddon*, which sits outside of the official Gold Master Series.

* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Evercade: Data East Arcade 2
I've been loving *Blaze*'s recent focus on arcade compilations and this one is loaded with hits. More please.



NICK

Tetris Forever
You give me a documentary with over a dozen versions of *Tetris*, and expect me not to make it my pick?





» [Switch] Here's a warp back to Bombliss in *Tetris Time Warp*—you need to detonate a big bomb.



» [Switch] The interviewees, such as Henk (left) and Alexey here, make the documentary a breeze.

crash on the NES version, you shouldn't expect to see interviews with players or anything like that—the documentary mostly covers *Tetris* from the point of view of those who have made and sold it, and the process of getting that done. This isn't a bad thing, just something that you may wish to be aware of.

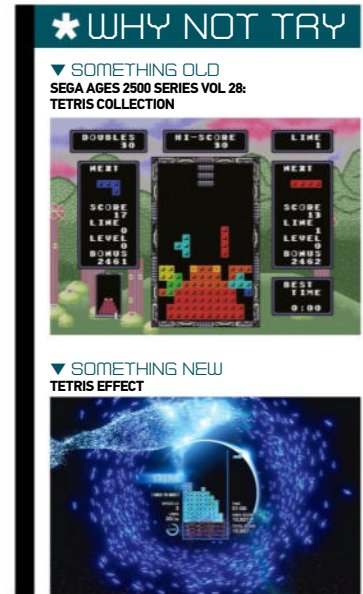
Of course, the impatient can just skip the documentary and dive straight into the games. Unfortunately, where *Atari 50* and *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story* felt quite comprehensive as game compilations, *Tetris Forever* can't match them. While nobody would reasonably expect the inclusion of games that are still on the market like *Tetris Effect* or *Tetris 99*, there are plenty of games which are important to the series and discussed at length in the documentary, but aren't available to play. These include the

Game Boy version, Nintendo and Tengen's NES versions, Sega's arcade version and the *Tetris: The Grand Master* games it inspired.

If you focus on what is present rather than what isn't, there's plenty to enjoy. The original Elektronika 60 version of *Tetris* is recreated, and it's fascinating to see the game in its most raw form, and the Spectrum Holobyte versions of the game for PC and Apple II are also present. Most of the games available are from Bullet Proof Software, including the Famicom version of *Tetris* and the much-loved SNES game *Tetris Battle Gaiden*, which introduces cute characters and special attacks. Some variety is provided via the inclusion of *Hatris*, and plenty of games include *Bombliss*, a variant where clearing pieces depends on completing lines containing bombs. There's also *Tetris Time Warp*, a fun new

game that takes you through the history of the series. After every tenth line you clear, a piece will drop that rapidly shifts through different visual styles until it is locked in place. Once it is, clearing that line containing those visually distinct blocks will warp you back to the corresponding time period—1984, 1989 or 1993—and give you a timed challenge, like clearing two lines at once. Beat the challenge, and you'll move on to the next time zone and score bonus points.

Intellectual property rights are at the heart of the *Tetris* story, and *Tetris Forever* shows it both directly through its documentary portion and indirectly through its game selection. That's the result of Digital Eclipse doing its best with a very awkward situation—Nintendo is simply never going to license the Game Boy version

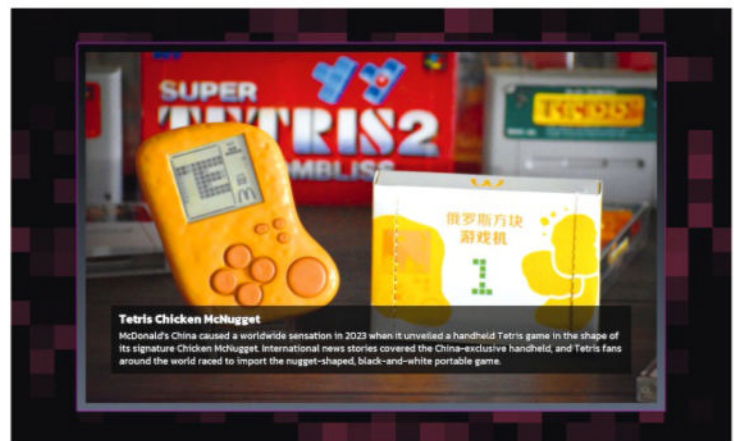


of *Tetris* for a game like this, no matter how important it is to the historical story being told. Does the documentary still have value without playable renditions of the game's most iconic versions? We feel that if it's impossible to make the ideal documentary, we'd rather have a really good one than nothing at all. Whether you agree with us will ultimately determine whether or not you pick this up. *

In a nutshell

The latest entry in the Gold Master Series is one Digital Eclipse can be proud of, though one that inadvertently highlights the struggles involved in creating a digital documentary involving fragmented intellectual property rights.

>> **Score 84%**



» [Switch] You'll see some real oddities, like the playable Tetris McNugget from China.

* PICK OF THE MONTH



Evercade Multi-Game Cartridges

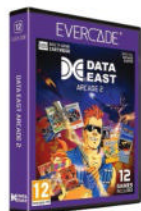
» System: Evercade series » Buy it for: £1799 each » Buy it from: Online, retail



Blaze Entertainment finishes off 2024 with a great collection of arcade-themed carts. We'll be looking

at *Data East Arcade 2* and *Toaplan Arcade 3* here, but *Toaplan Arcade 4* and *Metal Dragon/Life On Mars* are also available to buy now.

Twelve games feature on *Data East Arcade 2* and it's a robust selection. The highlights are easily *Edward Randy*, a brash, over-the-top action game, *Burgertime* sequel *Super Burgertime* and *Joe & Mac Returns*, a single-screen action game that's similar to *Toaplan's Snow Bros. Express Raider* is a decent action game, *Crude Buster* is an enjoyable



scrolling fighter, while *Shoot Out* is a challenging single-screen shooter. *Last Mission*, *B-Wings* and *SRD: Super Real Darwin* are OK shmups, while *Trio The Punch: Never Forget Me* is a forgettable average action

>> **Score 80%**

game. That leaves *Peter Pepper's Ice Cream Factory* and the run-and-gun *Midnight Resistance*.

Toaplan Arcade 3 lacks the variety of its *Data East* counterpart, but makes up for it in sheer quality. Cheekily, the incredible *Batsugun* and its *Special Version* are both included as separate games. *Out Zone* and *FixEight* are two challenging on-foot shooters, while *Truxton II* is a magnificent sequel with tremendous visuals and entertaining boss encounters. That leaves *Vimana*, a slick, underrated shmup and the quirky *Ghox*, an odd, but inventive take on the *Arkanoid* formula.

Both collections feature the usual solid emulation from Blaze, additional stickers and full-colour manuals and are absolutely worth adding to your collection. If you can only opt for one we'd pick the *Toaplan* pack, but it's obviously very shmup heavy.



>> **Score 91%**



» [Evercade] The arcade version's control system isn't properly emulated, but *Midnight Resistance* is still fun.



» [Evercade] We never played *Joe & Mac Returns* in arcades, but it's an excellent single-screen action game.

WipEout Futurism: The Graphic Archives

» Buy it for: £45
» Buy it from: thamesandhudson.com

Few games are as visually striking as the PlayStation's defining futuristic racer, with bold, clean graphic design from



The Designers Republic combining with diverse landscapes to create an unforgettable look. This hefty tome by Duncan Harris does that legacy proud, showing off everything from logos and game covers to concept art and adverts, with beautiful treatments including metallic inks where appropriate. But it's not just filled with pretty pictures – there are interviews with key developers and even copies of fax correspondence sent during development, giving a complete picture of how the games came to be. The result is a comprehensive history book that, while certainly not cheap, is just about as good as any we've ever seen and an essential purchase for fans of the anti-gravity racing series.

NICK THORPE



Irem Collection Vol.2

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » Buy it for: £19.99
» Buy it from: Online

Once upon a time the latest set of Irem collections would have come in a single package, rather than being spread across five separate releases. The second volume is now here and while it features some fun games it still feels rather lacking. The biggest issue of course is that you're only getting three standalone games, *GunForce I* and *II* and *Air Duel*, a solid vertical shmup. Yes there are regional variants and the SNES version of *GunForce* but they add little to the overall package. The emulation is of a good quality and there's a raft of extras and options, but it can't hide the fact that this is a rather disappointing collection.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 67%**



The Epyx Games Sports Collection

» System: Switch
» Buy it for: £11.99 » Buy it from: Online

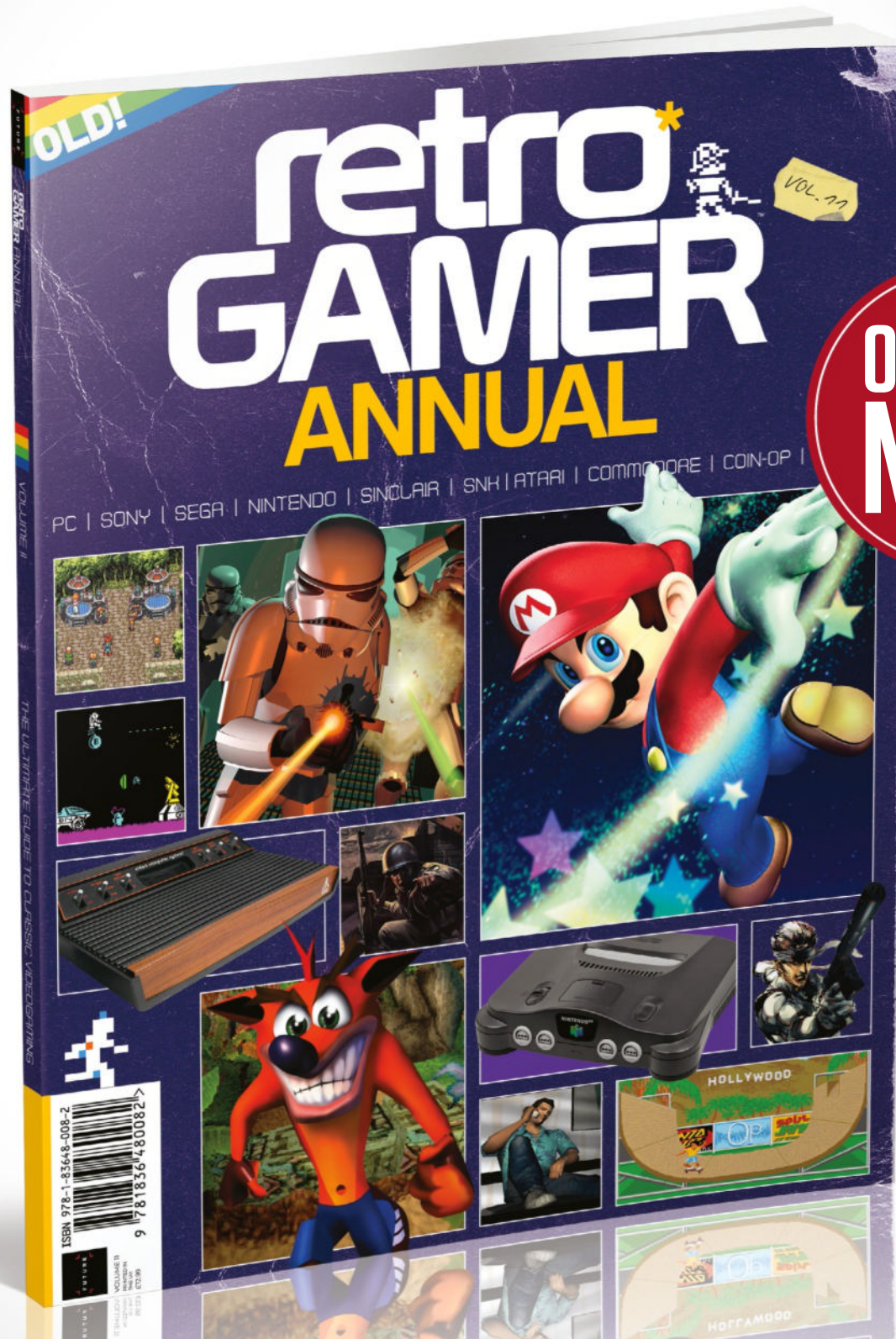
This collection brings together eight titles including *Summer Games*, *World Games*, *California Games* and slightly more surprisingly, *Championship Wrestling*. Epyx always did make great multi-sports games and they do hold up well, with the number of events represented giving some sense of variety. Fans of specific versions should note that all eight games are the Commodore 64 versions, but the emulation is solid and you get a few display options, including CRT distortion. You also get save states and 3D game boxes to look at, but otherwise the presentation is minimal. Still, it's hard to grumble given the cost per game here.

NICK THORPE

>> **Score 77%**

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THE HOME BREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE>

<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] WITH GLORIOUSLY SMOOTH SCROLLING AND DETAILED GRAPHICS, SCRAMBLE RX IS SHAPING UP NICELY. -->

<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] HERE'S THE FIREBALL SECTION IN SCRAMBLE RX. -->



<!-- 2024'S COLLECTION INCLUDES ALLAN'S SCRAMBLE RX AND PAC-MAN RX, PLUS MOUSTACHIO, MAZE OF THE ROBOTS AND DINGO. -->

<INTRO> HALLOWEEN HAD JUST OCCURRED AT THE TIME OF WRITING – BRINGING LOTS OF NEW HORROR-THEMED GAMES AND MAKING IT APPROPRIATE FOR OUR FEATURE ON MIDNIGHT BREW GAMES. A LEGENDARY DUO IS WORKING HARD TO BRING US A NEW GAME FOR THE SPECTRUM NEXT, AND SHOOT-‘EM-UP FANS WILL LOVE THE LOOK OF THE SNES TITLE WE ARE PREVIEWING. WITH THREE HIGH-SCORING AND DIVERSE REVIEWS, IT'S ANOTHER PACKED COLUMN AS WE HEAD TOWARDS THE END OF 2024.</INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

ALLAN'S MIDNIGHT MAGIC

<INTRO> FROM DISTANT KAZAKHSTAN, SPECTRUM FAN ALLAN TURVEY IS RUNNING HIS HOMEBREW LABEL MIDNIGHT BREW GAMES AND CREATING DAZZLING ARCADE CONVERSIONS </INTRO>

001 <BODY> Allan Turvey's latest project is a
002 natural evolution for him. "I've spent most of my
003 life working freelance and running small businesses,
004 so publishing my own games on my own label really
005 appealed to me. I also like the idea of collaborating
006 with other creative people in the community," he
007 says. "The word 'midnight' has a special meaning for
008 Spectrum fans, but it's what we old-school coders
009 get up to – cooking stuff up in the middle of the night!
010 Plenty of publishers go for that colourful and cartoony
011 approach so we wanted to do the exact opposite – a
012 very minimal, mostly black-and-white style that ties in
013 with the name. The final decision came when I heard
014 the song *Midnight Brew* by Melvin Carter."

015 Physical editions are sold via Ko-Fi at
016 bit.ly/midnightbrew. "We may well switch over to
017 our own website as the label grows," Allan says.
018 "Tape duplication has seen a real resurgence in
019 recent years, there are companies that provide a
020 service at reasonable prices. There is still a lot of
021 work involved, but it means more time and effort
022 can be put into the creative side."

023 Allan's latest project is *Scramble RX*. "I'm
024 passionate about the Golden Age of arcade games,
025 the way that coders were experimenting. If I convert
026 a game, it has to be one I really love. The next thing
027 is to play the original game a lot and get a feel for the

028 mechanics – it's almost like digital archaeology. As for
029 the accuracy, it goes with the territory – you're taking
030 it on as a challenge, so you can't take shortcuts."

031 The first Midnight Brew special release is the 40th
032 anniversary package of *Dracula* (see **RG** 260) and
033 *Frank N Stein Rebooted* by Colin Stewart, displayed
034 at CRASH! Live in November. "We were approached
035 by Mark Harrison, who had done some work with
036 Colin on the unfinished *Dracula*," Allan continues.
037 "Colin also rewrote *Frank N Stein* from scratch about
038 ten years ago. We quickly realised we could do

BRILLIANT BREWS



LUNAR RESCUE RX
bit.ly/lunar-zx

<The classic Taito coin-op from 1979 is brilliantly remade here for the Spectrum and can be also found in Midnight Brew's Arcade RX pack. >



NIXY & THE SEEDS OF DOOM
bit.ly/nixy-seeds

<This is the second game featuring Nixy The Glade Sprite, there is a C64 conversion underway by Haplo. >

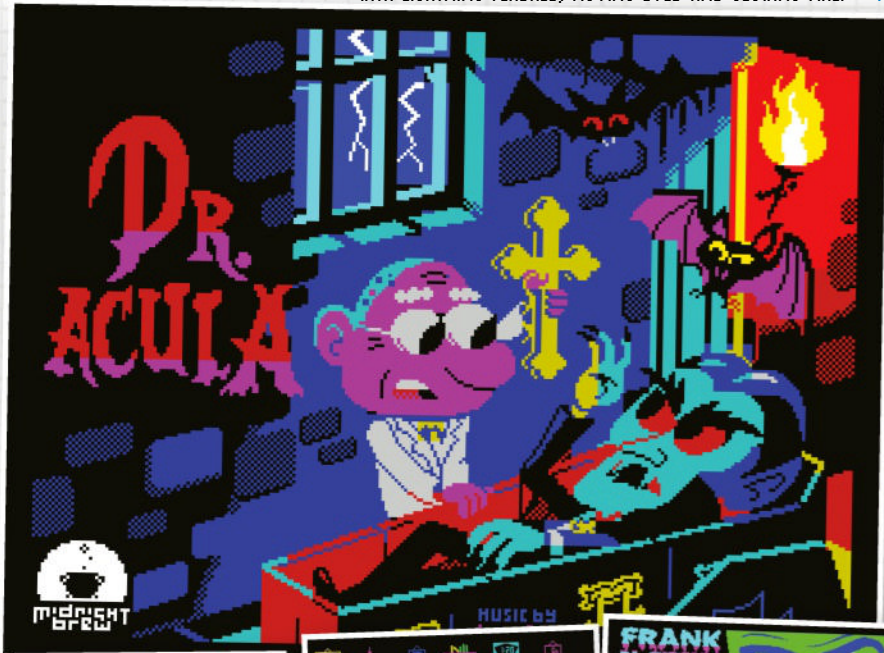


<!-- ALLAN TURVEY OF MIDNIGHT BREW GAMES WITH HIS WHITE SPECTRUM. -->

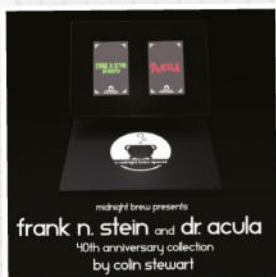
NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com

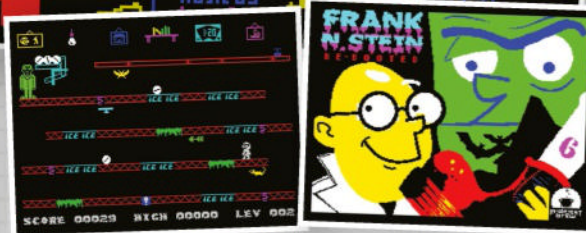
<--- [ZX SPECTRUM] ON LOADING, THE BRILLIANT BITMAP FOR DR ACULA ANIMATES WITH LIGHTNING FLASHES, MOVING EYES AND GLOWING FIRE. --->



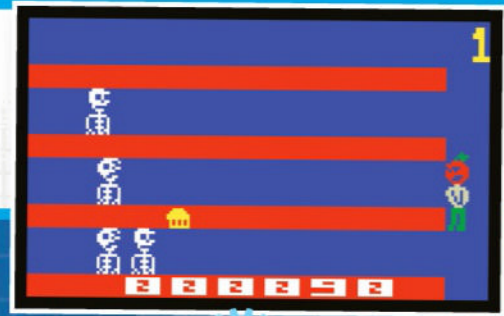
<--- [ZX SPECTRUM] THE CLEVER MIDNIGHT BREW LOGO APPEARS BEFORE THE MAIN LOADING SCREEN. --->



<--- PACKAGING FOR DR ACULA AND FRANK N STEIN REBOOTED. --->



039 something interesting by uniting an Eighties bedroom
040 coder with those of us who are still burning that
041 midnight oil. We wanted to celebrate that enduring
042 creativity and spirit of homebrew. That's why we
043 went the extra mile and had original artwork restored,
044 as well as showcasing some of the original graph
045 paper that Colin used to design the game in 1984."
046 So what's next for Midnight Brew? "We look
047 for people whose work we admire. I've become
048 great pals with Bob Hamilton. We're planning to do
049 remakes of his early games as well as completing
050 the *Backpacker* trilogy. I loved *Tir Na Nog* and *Dun*
051 *Darach* and always thought it should have been a
052 trilogy – the same goes for *Marsport*. It would be
053 wonderful to help create an official *Mire Mare*, a final
054 chapter in the Ultimate story." </BODY>



NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY
ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<Amiga: Electric Black Sheep remade *Tower Of Evil* and has created an unofficial sequel *Tale Of Evil*. Learn more by visiting electricblacksheep.itch.io />

<Atari 7800: A superb port of *Bubble Bobble* is currently in development, check the AtariAge thread at bit.ly/bb-atari7800 for more news. />

<BBC Micro: Bitshifters updated the classic *Ghouls* with two new modes, 60 new levels and a level editor. Download it at bit.ly/ghouls-revenge />

<C64: The hit card game *Balatro* is on the way from Ko-Ko, with PleasureBytes Games planning a physical release. Take a gamble over at bit.ly/balatro-c64 />

<Dreamcast: OroFace Games is organising Dream Disc '24, a game jam with the winners appearing on a CD compilation. There's more news at bit.ly/dreamdisc24 />

<Game Boy: Edward La Barbera released the director's cut of his fun RPG *Frasier Fantasy* (originally reviewed in **RG** 253), with new locations and characters. Play it at bit.ly/frasiergb-directors />

<Intellivision: Oscar Toledo G unleashed his new Halloween game *Pumpkin Bakery* (pictured). Grab it from bit.ly/pumpkin-bakery />

<NES: *Famidash* – the brilliant conversion of *Geometry Dash* previewed in **RG** 262 – has been released and updated. You'll find it at rhpz.org/famidash />

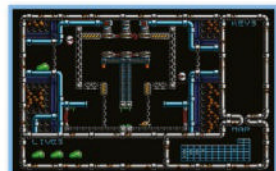
<PICO-8: Heracleum converted the Intellivision game *Thunder Castle*. You can play it by visiting bit.ly/thunder-p8 />

<Steam: *The Edge Of Allegoria* from Button Factory Games is a 2D RPG with Game Boy-inspired graphics and adult themes. So it's not for kids. Feeling naughty? Then head to bit.ly/allegoria-pc />

<Various: *Between The Scanlines* is a fortnightly retro gaming and media fanzine you can download from betweenthescanlines.itch.io />

<ZX Spectrum: Climb the *Magic Tower* in this new game from Seagal, with music by Lee Bee. Name your price at bit.ly/magictower-zx />

<INTRO> FIVE TOP-NOTCH POTIONS FROM THE WIZARDS AT MIDNIGHT BREW GAMES </INTRO>



OOZE: THE ESCAPE
bit.ly/ooze-amiga

<Midnight Brew published Haplo's excellent Amiga conversion on floppy disk. The game is based on the Spectrum original from Andy Johns. />



PAC-MAN RX
bit.ly/pacmanrx

<Getting an **RG** Sizzler in issue 262, this superb recreation marked the arcade game's 44th anniversary and is part of the 2024 collection. />



ROUSE
bit.ly/roustrx

<2022's set of five tapes included this superb update of the Williams hits. It's another polished Spectrum conversion from the publisher. />

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CHAMPION CODER

TONY WARRINER

<INTRO> INDUSTRY VETERAN TONY IS WORKING WITH ARTIST STOO CAMBRIDGE ON URBX WARRIORS </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: KINGSTON UPON HULL, ENGLAND WEBSITE: UPOSPARES.ITCH.IO TONYWARRINER.SUBSTACK.COM FORMAT: SPECTRUM NEXT PREVIOUS GAMES: BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS (VARIOUS), BENEATH A STEEL SKY WORKING ON: URBX WARRIORS (SPECTRUM NEXT) >

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN PROGRAMMING THE SPECTRUM NEXT?

<I'd always been excited by the idea and backed the first Kickstarter. I attended Crash Live! and was blown away by the enthusiasm. I started talking with Chris Wilkins of Fusion Retro. Being able to create beautiful packaging [for the planned physical release] is a big part of what we're doing. The Next is a clever thing; it's still a Spectrum, but the additional functionality – hardware sprites, tile maps, hardware scrolling – turns it into the Super Spectrum we all dreamt of. >

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO MAKE URBX WARRIORS?

<The simplicity of arcade cabinet games – easy to get into but threw the player straight into the action. Also, Gauntlet on the Mega Drive stood out as a great game which could evolve further. That took us to the 8-bit arcade adventure genre (related to today's Metroidvanias). We wondered whether all these things could be mixed and reborn on the Next. >

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE GAME?

<It's set around the modern-day trend



<!-- TONY WARRINER'S WEAPON OF CHOICE FOR THIS PROJECT, THE SPECTRUM NEXT. -->

for 'urban exploring', our heroes hunt down some odd-looking jungle remains they've seen on satellite images. They're expecting to return with all manner of valuable ancient artefacts but

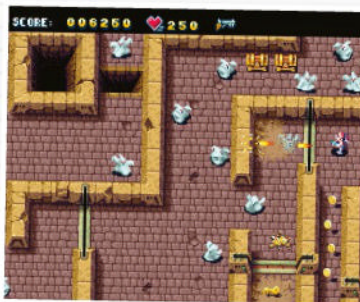
are dragged into a nightmarish hellhole and must combine brain and brawn to have any chance of escaping! >

HOW DID STOO CAMBRIDGE BECOME INVOLVED?

<I was on a panel with Stoo at ZZAP! Live and we got on like a house on fire. It slowly dawned on us that we should do a project together. We both have roots in the Eighties and Nineties; me with Revolution and Stoo with Sensible. The process has been very easy. >

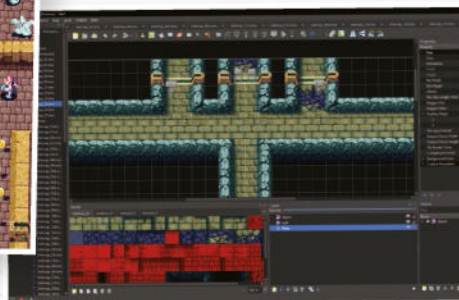
ANY OTHER RETRO PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT?

<Wormhole Dungeon is another arcade adventure, but PC-based as it's quite complex. It probably needs another year of work. We plan to port UrbX upwards through Amiga to PC and then perhaps Mega Drive and Dreamcast. I'm going to be extremely busy far into the future! >



<!-- [SPECTRUM NEXT] LOOK OUT! G-G-GHOSTS! PICK UP THE KEY AND OPEN THE CHESTS. -->

<!-- [SPECTRUM NEXT] MAPS FOR MANY HOMEBREW GAMES ARE DEVELOPED IN PC APP TILED. -->



DATA BURST

INSPECTOR WAFFLES EARLY DAYS

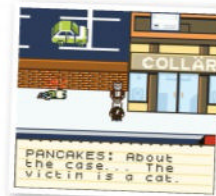
<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR / STEAM CREDITS: GOLOSO GAMES (DEVELOPER), BROKE STUDIO (PUBLISHER) PRICE: TBC DIGITAL/PHYSICAL WEB: BIT.LY/WAFFLES-EARLYDAYS BIT.LY/WAFFLESEARLY-STEAM >

<BODY> The follow-up to the 2021 point-and-click adventure *Inspector Waffles*, Goloso Games takes you back to the young cat's first day on the Cattown Police Force with this prequel we first previewed back in RG 255.

When a rare videogame is stolen, Waffles and his partner Pancakes must work out who is responsible – the first of six cleverly interlinked cases. Moving around town is as simple as clicking on the map icons, you can then examine a crime scene for clues, then interrogate suspects to find the answers; the clever icons in the interface make the process easy to follow. Pancakes can save your progress, but he also asks you the four key questions Waffles needs to answer correctly to solve the case. The excellent pixel art is endearing, with great musical cues and sound effects. There is some backtracking, and you will hit dead ends, but returning to a location and asking questions will help you get back on track. One frustration is missing very small clues or items in a case that you need for another. Thankfully, it is still an enjoyable and realised world, with animal-related puns and real-world references that help build believability. The end result is a highly enjoyable addition to the detective genre.</BODY>

SCORE:

86%



<!-- [GAME BOY COLOR] AN EARLY CLUE TO THE MISSING VIDEOGAME CARTRIDGE IS THIS SMASHED WINDOW. -->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com



<!-- ZX SPECTRUM 128K YOU KNOW THE SCORE -->
-- BASH THE BRICKS FROM BENEATH AND JUMP ON ENEMY HEADS. -->



<!-- ZX SPECTRUM 128K LATER LEVELS INTRODUCE ENEMIES AND CANNONS THAT SHOOT AT YOU. -->



MARLOW IN APOCALYPTIC ACID WORLD

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (128K) CREDITS: AMAWEKS PRICE: \$6 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: [BIT.LY/MARLOW-ZX128](http://bit.ly/marlow-zx128) />

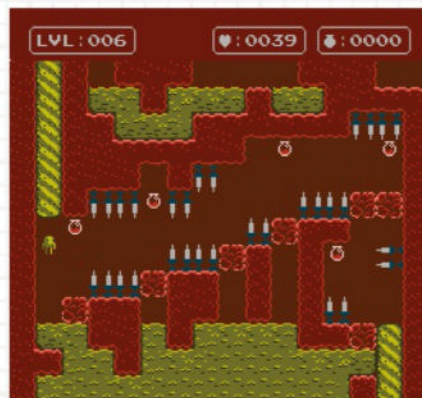
<BODY> Inspired by *The Great Giana Sisters*, Marlow must fight back against a computer AI by defeating the Landlords in their Panoptic Towers. Cue superb flick-screen platforming action across 17 different levels and five entertaining boss fights. You must jump on enemy heads and avoid their fire, collecting crystals as you go (100 will grant an extra life). Find power-ups and secret rooms to help you – the Nuclear Briefcase makes you run faster, while beer bottles can be thrown at enemies. There are also clever forced-scroll levels where you must dodge various hazards. Split into two separate loads, there is great detail and style in the surreal graphics accompanied by a brilliant soundtrack. This is Amaweeks' best game for your Spectrum yet. Don't miss it. </BODY>

SCORE:

90%



<!-- [NES] SPIKY THINGS, ACID AND THE LARGE PARASITES ALL COST A LIFE ON CONTACT. -->



<!-- [NES] WITH CRUMBLING RED PLATFORMS, THIS LEVEL REQUIRES CAREFULLY TIMED DASHES TO MAKE IT OUT ALIVE. -->

FLEA 2

<INFO FORMAT: NES (REVIEWED), DREAMCAST (TBC) CREDITS: LOWTEK GAMES PRICE: \$3.99 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE TBC WEB: [BIT.LY/FLEA2-NES](http://bit.ly/flea2-nes) />

<BODY> Alistair Low is back with more adventures for Henry The Hyperactive Flea. To gain his fellow fleas' freedom, Henry must gather vials of blood – which can be swapped every few levels for extra lives. The two buttons allow Henry to calm down his jump (making the next bounce lower) and dash sideways. Fiendish level design means the game has a good learning curve and gets trickier gradually. There are also clever forced-scrolling levels as you flee a flight of wasps. Jump on this tough, top-notch sequel today. </BODY>

SCORE:

88%

THE HOMEBREWER'S



PROCESSING

<INTRO> Kannagichan is working on SUPERDAN, A VERTICALLY SCROLLING SHOOT-EM-UP FOR THE SNES </INTRO>

<BODY> Kannagichan has great ambitions for their new game. "It will probably be the first SNES shmup that displays 100 bullets on the screen!" we're told. "In total, you will have 128 sprites on the screen. I had to optimise quite a bit to get this result. It also uses transparency and palette effects."

In terms of traditional shmups, Kannagichan has been inspired by some greats. "Mainly *Raiden* and *doDonPachi*, along with a bit of *Super Aleste* in some ways, more for the technical side."

SuperDan is being developed on Linux, among the tools used are Audacity for sound, GIMP for graphics and Tiled to make maps and place enemies. "For code, I use Geany, a small IDE that is easily configurable and lightweight," Kannagichan continues. "I code with a language that I created called Higueul, it is faster than C, and higher level than assembly. There is no good C compiler for this machine. That's why I created my own language that optimises pretty well for the SNES. The game will be available in cartridge and digital versions either in late 2025 or 2026, there will be a Kickstarter in 2025." Needless to say, we're looking forward to it. </BODY>



<!-- [SNES] AMONG THE PLANNED FEATURES IS A TIMED CARAVAN MODE FOR HIGH-SCORE CHASERS. -->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

DELIBERATING THE DS

The team recalls their first encounters with Nintendo's handheld



DARRAN JONES



NICK THORPE



TIM EMPEY

» [DS] *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* may not have been a conventional videogame, but it was extremely popular.

Has it really been 20 years since Nintendo's dual-screened marvel first launched? Well yes it has, and the team is marking that important milestone by looking back at Nintendo's 'third pillar' and reminiscing about those first few experiences with the system.

DARRAN

What was your first encounter with the DS?

NICK

You know, I can't actually remember. I feel like it was a demo unit in a shop? I'll be honest, I wasn't particularly hyped up for the DS.

TIM

We got some on *Cube* just before they were released in the UK. Not enough for the whole

team, but I managed to nab one because I was quicker than Ryan to shout, "Gimmie!" when one was offered to us. It was alright, we shared a flat at the time so he got to play it loads.

DARRAN

I had one of the first on *games™* as I imported mine from the states. Mine came with *Super Mario 64 DS*, *Spider-Man 2* and *Feel The Magic: XY/XX* (aka *Project Rub*). What's the first game you guys played on it?

NICK

It was *Sonic Rush*, which I'm sure will shock everyone reading this. It's one of the good *Sonic* games, and has a particularly excellent soundtrack.

TIM

Project Rub, *Polarium* and *Zoo Keeper* were the first ones

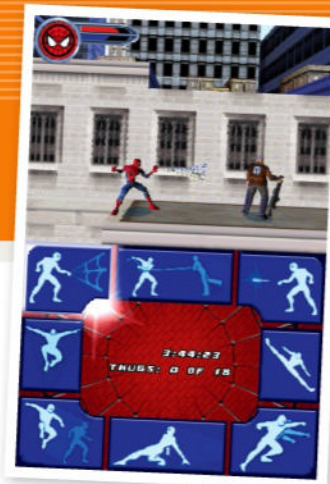
I played. I liked *Zoo Keeper* the most out of those three, though it gets a bit frantic. Liz and I used to try to beat each other's scores and it got pretty competitive to say the least.

DARRAN

Zoo Keeper was great fun and I also played it a lot on release. Although if I remember, you couldn't save high scores, which seemed crazy. What did people think of the actual system? I think it's quite a cheap-looking machine, sadly.

NICK

I still have the original model of the DS and don't mind the look of it, probably because that really ugly prototype Nintendo showed at E3 2004 made it look attractive by comparison. Actually, I prefer it to the Lite because GBA carts don't stick out awkwardly.



» [DS] *Spider-Man 2* proved that not every game made good use of the DS' touch-screen.

DARRAN

I must admit, even though I wasn't a fan of the form factor, the stylus was amazing. I loved how the DS made developers constantly think of new ways to play games. Things like *Yoshi's Touch & Go* were great, although I think we only scored it a 7/10 in *games™*.

TIM

I do remember getting a bit hand-crampy playing some of the games – the ones that didn't use the stylus as much.

DARRAN

I know a lot of people struggled with *Metroid Prime Hunters* at work, but that was never an issue for me.

NICK

My sister's first console was a DS Lite, and she needed a larger stylus because holding the regular ones set off her arthritis unfortunately.

DARRAN

Talking of the stylus, what was the best game you played that utilised it? I'll have to go with *Ouendan*. My goodness that game was good.

NICK

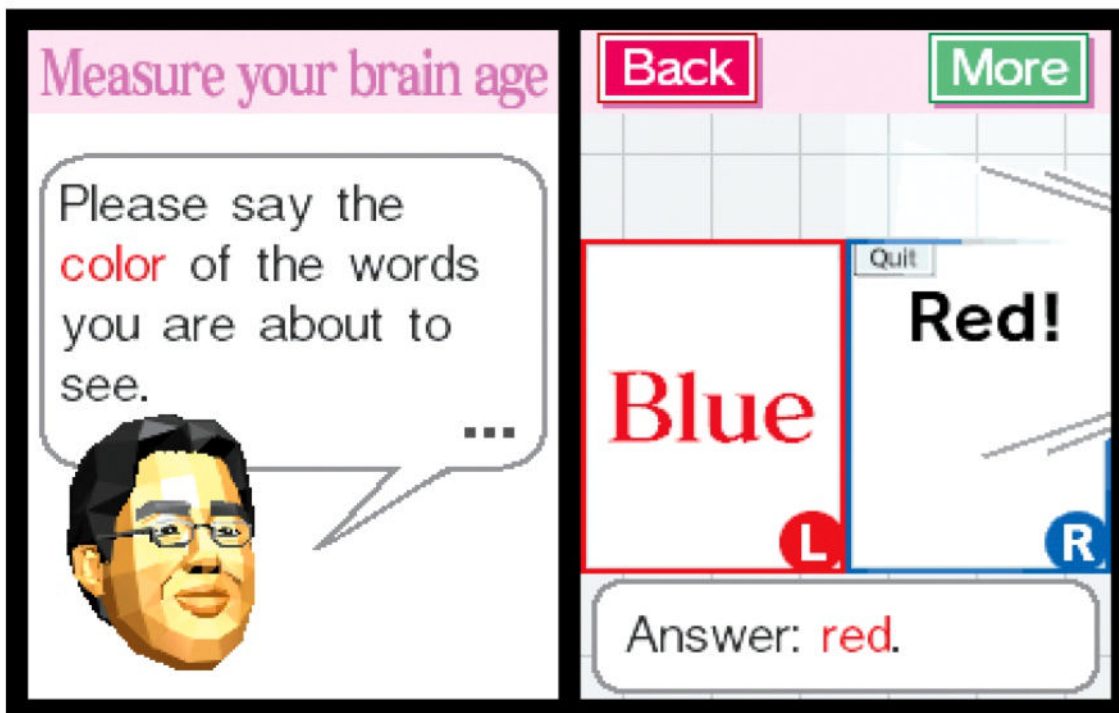
I'd go with *WarioWare Touched!*, but it was just a great showcase for all of the system's quirky features.

DARRAN

The same can be said for *Project Rub*, Nick.

TIM

Zookeeper, obviously, I can't imagine playing it without one. And *WarioWare* like Nick says. I





» [DS] *WarioWare Touched!* like *Project Rub*, did a great job of highlighting the DS' strengths.

also spent way too long poking dogs in *Nintendogs*, I was oddly addicted to that for a few weeks.

DARRAN

I think one of the strengths of the console was how all these non-traditional games started appearing on the system. They certainly seemed to upset a lot of reviewers at the time. In fact, I'd argue that it felt like there was a certain snobbery from the gaming press over a lot of DS games, which would continue with mobile games and the Wii.

NICK

Funnily enough, *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* sits atop the DS chart in Back To The Noughties this month. *Official Nintendo Magazine's* comment? "We asked politely, we begged and the only recourse now is violence. You've been warned. Buy. Something. Else." So yeah, I think you're on the money.

TIM

Probably because for every gem there was a glut of utter trash like *Peter Jackson's King Kong* and other shovelware to compare it to.

DARRAN

You're quite right about the shovelware Tim, although



» [DS] A dog wearing a silly hat. No wonder so many people loved *Nintendogs*.

that's true of any popular console, and the DS was very, very popular. One thing I'm surprised Nick hasn't mentioned yet is the many great puzzle games that were on the system (and yes, I know Tim has mentioned a couple).

NICK

Oh, you don't know how hard it was for me to give my sister *Meteos* for Christmas instead of keeping it for myself. Then you had stuff like *Puzzle League DS* and *Magnetica* too, it was great.

DARRAN

Tetris DS is also incredible, and then there's *Puzzle Quest* and the many *Professor Layton* games. It really is a great system for puzzle games. Did you play any others, Tim?

TIM

Nah, I was on *Play* by the time those came out – no more free DS games unfortunately. Anyway, because of this issue, I'm going to finally finish *Phantom Hourglass*. I've still got a saved game from 2007!

DARRAN

I liked *Phantom Hourglass*, but not being able to use traditional controls to play it was a drag. You had to drag Link around with the stylus instead. ★



» [DS] It didn't get great scores on release, but we still think *Yoshi's Touch & Go* is ace.



» [DS] If *Super Mario 64 DS* highlighted one thing, it was that the DS sorely needed an analogue stick.

READERS REACT

The games you loved playing on Nintendo's DS

Reonan

Dementium I and II. It's absolutely shocking to me how they managed to create decent horror games on a handheld.

daver maker

The Sims 2, for being the bizarre hotel-management sim no one expected.

Arcade & Home Theater

Professor Layton And The Curious Village. Games are often at their best when they grab you and you get lost in them. *Curious Village* did that for me quite unexpectedly. I really felt like I was exploring a quirky and fun village, and experiencing a game unlike any I'd played before

Cyrus

Metroid Prime Hunters was the closest Nintendo ever got to a hardcore arena shooter outside *Splatoon*. I nearly destroyed my DS from the amount of intense online matches I had in that game.

Retro Nez

Hotel Dusk, great characters and a cool detective style plot. Not to mention the cool soundtrack and unique puzzles!

Moebox Gaming

Nintendogs is definitely the one I played the most. Countless road trips were spent throwing frisbee with a virtual pet haha! My favourite would have to be *Pokémon Heart Gold*. It's my favourite Pokémon game and one I go back to to this day!

DePhiZero26

999: *Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors*. Who knew a visual novel would work so well on the system? There's multiple endings, horror elements, puzzle solving and a great story and characters.

Shane

Mine will always be *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. I got it for Christmas the year it came out, and it was my first experience with the series. I was immediately addicted to it and spent so many hours with it!

AgentBoolean

Rub Rabbits was one with an interesting style that just felt like it took advantage of the innovations features of the DS in an odd and interesting way. I enjoyed the style and the gameplay.

David

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars, the best of both the top-down and 3D eras of *Grand Theft Auto*, plus excellent use of the DS touch-screen.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



GAME BOY

"I bought this off a friend when he got bored of it. I've still got it and will still complete *Super Mario Land*, *WWF Superstars* and *Tetris* game 2 on the hardest setting."

AMOUNT PAID:
NEAR TO
NOTHING



MEGA DRIVE II AND MEGA-CD II

"It was the first new console I ever purchased with one of my first ever pay packets, from Dixons in Croydon."

AMOUNT PAID:
FULL PRICE



BIO

NAME:
Duncan Griffiths

LOCATION:
Shefford, Bedfordshire

ESTIMATED VALUE OF
COLLECTION:
"Would hate to guess"

FAVOURITE SYSTEMS:
ZX Spectrum, Mega-CD

FAVOURITE GAMES:
Space Invaders, *Chuckie Egg*, *Sonic The Hedgehog*

SOCIAL MEDIA:
@dunktech (Twitter/
Instagram/YouTube/
BlueSky)

THE LONG GAME

Duncan Griffiths has been collecting for over three decades

This month's collector isn't entirely sure of his first gaming experience, but knows that it was in the early Eighties. "I can't remember if it was *Chuckie Egg* on the Acorn Electron, *Hyper Sports* at the arcade at Lyme Regis while on holiday, *Asteroids* in the off-licence in South London or playing *Smurf* round a friend's house on his ColecoVision," Duncan admits. However, his collecting habit is much more easily traced. "I'm one of those people that didn't have all the latest consoles when I was a kid, so as soon as I started working around 1992 I would buy everything I ever wanted from car boot sales and charity shops – long before prices went sky-high and you could buy games for a couple of quid."

The result is the highly impressive space you see here. "I've got to the point where I have pretty much everything I had on my list." It does seem like it would really be easier to highlight what Duncan doesn't have in his collection, which encompasses all manner of consoles,

computers and even classic toys and figures. "I'm also trying to collect older computers which have also skyrocketed, so I have a few gaps like the Atari 600XE and the Amiga 1200 as an example." It doesn't look like there's much room for expansion though, and Duncan confirms that. "Sadly I have run out of space. I have various other bits stored away, for example I have boxed different versions of the Super Nintendo and NES and various ZX Spectrum setups. I've also got larger items like Apple Macs and older IBM PCs that sadly have to be put away."

Still, Duncan makes the most of his space with impressive custom cabinets. "I built the cabinets from the ground up just using cheap MDF and reinforcing it with better wood from behind. All the systems have their power and AV connections behind them," he explains. However, they're not all hooked up simultaneously. "I have a long extension cable and long connectors that I plug in when I want to switch one on. I toyed with the idea of

rigging them all up but it seemed pointless as I wouldn't use more than one at a time."

Duncan does have a philosophy on new acquisitions. "I've always preferred to buy something broken and fix it up as it saves a lot of money that way," he explains, before telling us that his usual hunting grounds are, "Facebook marketplace, eBay, car boot sales and markets," adding, "sometimes I still get luck at charity shops." He's also patient. "I will rarely buy anything new when it comes out, unless it's something mega like a new *GTA* game or *Batman* game," he admits. And despite his lack of space, he does tell us that there are some games he'd still happily pick up on the cheap. "*Conker's Bad Fur Day* is the perfect example," he says. "I'd love that game but not at the price tag it demands. I'm a real Sega nut so would love to complete the Sega collection by getting a *Nomad*, *Wondermega* or *Mega Jet*. But until I find one cheap, sadly I won't be buying them soon." ✨

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

f RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogammag.bsky.social

ACORN ELECTRON

"This was the first computer we had as a kid, we played *Chuckie Egg*, *Bandits At 3 O'Clock*, *Escape From Moon Base Alpha* and *Ghouls*, etc. I have so many happy memories on this."

AMOUNT PAID:
FORGOTTEN

ZX SPECTRUM

"It was the big upgrade. When buying games from the newsagents for £1.99 it was very limited on the Acorn. When we got the Spectrum so many games suddenly became available, mainly the *Dizzy* games and the *Mastertronic* games."

AMOUNT PAID:
FORGOTTEN



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

"This was something I had always wanted to see in real life but museums didn't have one. Just before the first lockdown one appeared locally on Facebook marketplace. I was there in a shot and got it. To me it's a jewel in the crown as it's the first ever home console made."

PAID: "A COUPLE OF HUNDRED POUNDS"



BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR NINTENDO DS

The popular handheld is abundant and easy to afford – we've seen boxed DS and DS Lite units go for as little as **£20**, and the DSi for **£25**. The DSi XL is a bit more pricey, starting at **£40** for a complete boxed unit. As usual, expect to pay more based on colour and condition, especially if you want a special edition variant of the console.



WIZARDRY: PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD

A complete original Apple II copy of this influential dungeon crawler will set you back **£70-170**, depending on condition. Other versions tend to be cheaper and more abundant.



SUPERFROG

If you want to get Team17's heroic hopper, original big box Amiga floppy disk copies have recently sold for **£70-80**. The CD32 version is cheaper at **£25-50**, but still surprisingly pricey.



CADAVER

The Bitmap Brothers' isometric adventure generally sells for **£30+** on Atari ST and **£15+** on Amiga in its big box form, though we've seen people get dead lucky with **£5** auction wins.



RESIDENT EVIL 2

Complete PlayStation copies can go as low as **£15**, but the going rate on Dreamcast starts around **£50**, and on GameCube you'll do well to get it under **£35**. Complete, boxed PAL N64 copies are just shy of **£200**.



JACKIE CHAN STUNTMASTER

The price here will give you a kicking – the lowest we've seen a complete, boxed copy sell for lately is **£85**, and it can go for as much as **£160**. US copies are a little cheaper, but not by much.



PROJECT RUB

Sonic Team's early DS showcase fluctuates in price – it hovers around the **£5** mark, but we've seen winning bids go both higher and lower. Still, this one is definitely a cheap date.



HOW MUCH?!

POKÉMON PLATINUM

A recent auction for this DS game ended at a whopping **£340**, and while the game did look to be in good condition, it didn't look to be anything special compared to others that went for considerably less. There's no way a game that sold over 7 million copies should be selling for such an absurd amount of money.



MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR SHARED PASSION

FAMILY FUN

Nick's sisters reminisce about their years with the DS



Whenever anyone talks about Nintendo's success in attracting broad

demographics with the DS, I can't help but think of my family – three of my younger sisters owned the ultra-popular console, and none of them had ever had a handheld console before. I didn't get to see their experiences with the DS up close as I was away at university during the console's prime, so I thought I'd talk to them about their memories of the time.

The eldest of the three is only a couple of years younger than I am, and was doing her A levels when she got a DS Lite. "I liked that it was portable," she remembers. "I could use it when mum was watching boring stuff on the telly, and it meant that I could have games that were me-specific, and didn't have to worry about what selection you had." She had occasionally borrowed my Game Boy Color to play *Pokémon* when we were younger, but with the single save slot reserved for me, she never got to make progress.

Emily was still in junior school when she got her DS. "I was in year six, and by the time Christmas came, nearly every single girl in my class had the pink DS Lite – I much preferred my silver one," she recalls. "Most girls would take them round each other's houses and play *Nintendogs* for hours on end!" Lianna, was still under two years old when the system launched, and surprisingly encountered the console in an educational setting. "In primary school I remember some of our lessons often

included using the DS for *Brain Training* and the teachers would take note of our scores at the end," she recalls.

The presence of the touch-screen was a big draw. "Most of my games on the DS utilised the touch-screen, which meant I only tended to use the buttons for *Mario Kart DS*," says Emily. "I remember this being such a novelty at the time, and is definitely what enticed me about the DS. Some of my games had dual-control options, but I definitely found it far easier to use the touch-screen." Lianna agrees, saying, "The touch-screen and keypad made it easy and accessible to play with no matter the age, which definitely made it more fun to play with."

Which games did they enjoy? "I really liked *Professor Layton*," says the eldest.

"Instead of most puzzle games where it's just one type of puzzle, it has quite a variety, and it had the little storyline to go with it." Unlike the younger two, she utilised the console's backwards compatibility with GBA games. "*Puzzle Fighter* was really fun, and I wasn't constantly being destroyed by you," she tells me. Emily's favourite game by far was *Guitar Hero: On Tour*. "Not only did it align with my music taste, but it was a totally different experience to anything I'd played before, due to the finger pad

attachment and the challenging pace at which you had to react," she explains. "I loved playing *The Sims*, and the *Sonic* games," says Lianna. "*The Sims* allowed me to create my dream houses and ideal life scenarios, whilst

"Nearly every girl in my class had the pink DS Lite"
EMILY THORPE

GAME OVER?

MY SISTERS DIDN'T GIVE UP ON GAMES ALTOGETHER

EMILY

Emily still plays on her phone, and there's an Xbox Series X in her living room whenever she wants to play it. Although she's younger than me, I frequently make her uncomfortable about her age by telling her that the *Assassin's Creed* series is old enough to be in **Retro Gamer** now. Her favourite retro game is the PlayStation 2 version of *Crazy Taxi*.

LIANNA

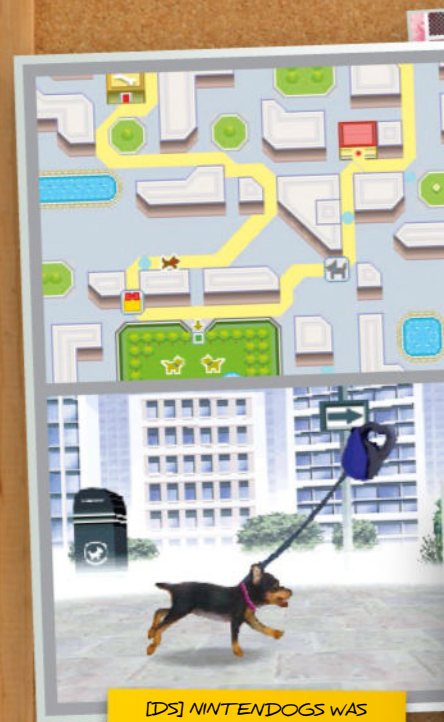
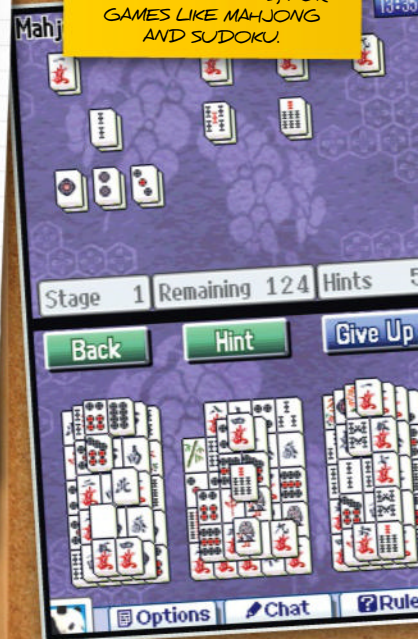
Lianna's fondness for *The Sims* has never really gone away. The last time I was drafted in as IT support and took a look at her laptop, I was surprised to see the Epic Games Store launcher installed on the machine. She told me that it was only there so she could play *The Sims 4*. Her favourite retro game is *Driver: San Francisco* for the Xbox 360.

Sonic was fun to play with and let me spend time with you."

For various reasons, none of them made the jump to the 3DS. For the eldest, it was a matter of pain – she was already beginning to suffer from arthritis while she had the DS, and no longer plays videogames. "Unfortunately, my time with the DS came to an end when my younger sister spilled coffee over my most prized possession," says Emily. "I was in year nine by the time the 3DS was released, so after two years of no DS Lite, I had transitioned to using games on my touch-screen phone," she says. Lianna's story is a little different, as she says, "I think I naturally just grew away from playing with my DS as I started playing out more after school and I became interested in other toys and games on the computer. I think I actually got a tablet before I got a phone, so I would play games on there instead."

While Nintendo didn't manage to make lifelong customers of my siblings, it's clear from the fondness with which they speak of the DS that it was a memorable machine, responsible for some good times. Really, what more can anyone ask for from a console? ★

[DS] THE ELDEST OF THE THREE ALSO LIKED 42 ALL-TIME CLASSICS, FOR GAMES LIKE MAHJONG AND SUDOKU.



[DS] NINTENDOGS WAS POPULAR WITH MOST OF THE GIRLS AT EMILY AND LIANNA'S SCHOOLS.

EXPANDED AUDIENCE

Readers tell us the family members that enjoyed the DS

L Break Into Program

We bought my mum a DS Lite with the *Brain Training* game for her 60th birthday present as she was into Sudoku. She loved it!

Chris Jowett

My partner, who has no interest in gaming whatsoever, specifically asked for a DS one Christmas with the *Brain Training* games and loved them! She also got a pink sparkly protective case to make the DS look better!

PokeParadox

I bought my grandma a second-hand DS XL and *Brain Training*, Sudoku and similar. She's still using it daily!

Video Games as Literature

I once babysat a couple of four year olds who had a Nintendo DS. They were instructing me on how to play the *Littlest Pet Shop* games for the DS, and it was so cute! I was pleasantly surprised that these kids who couldn't read yet were able to play videogames.

Rev Dare Cloud

My wife isn't a gamer, but she still has one from when she was in college. Our son still plays it.

Reiban José Zapata

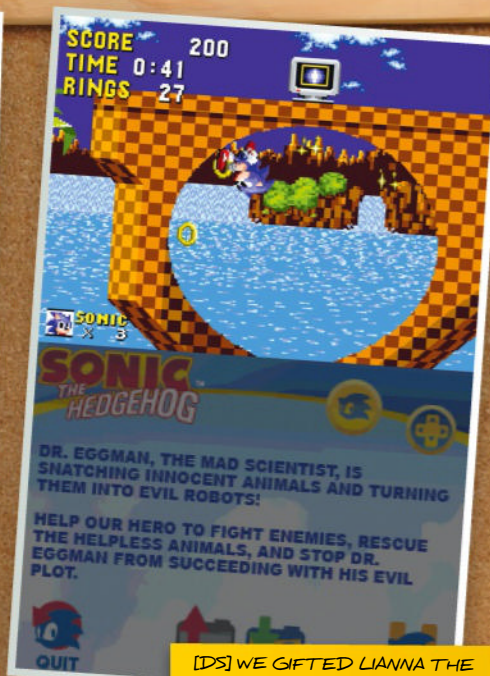
When my wife got pregnant, she bought a DS. It was so unexpected as she's not a gamer, I am, so it was exciting as now we would have two consoles at home, Wii and now a DS. She actually did play a lot until my son was born, so it went to her friend's daughter.

Cats & Cucumbers

My father-in-law (around 70 at the time) also enjoyed *Brain Training* and bought a DS Lite because of it. Expensive paperweight for him after a while but he got some fun out of it.



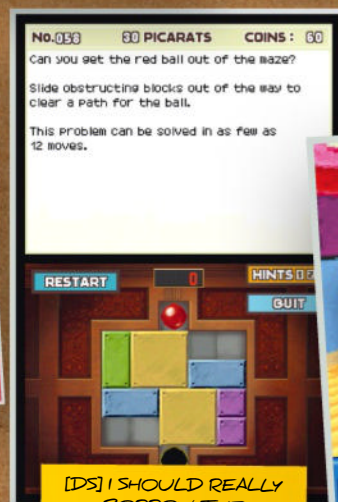
EMILY LOVED GUITAR HERO ON THE DS, AND I REMEMBER THE PS2 GAMES BEING POPULAR AT DAD'S HOUSE TOO.



[DS] WE GIFTED LIANNA THE SONIC CLASSIC COLLECTION BECAUSE SHE ALWAYS USED TO BORROW MY PHONE TO PLAY SONIC.



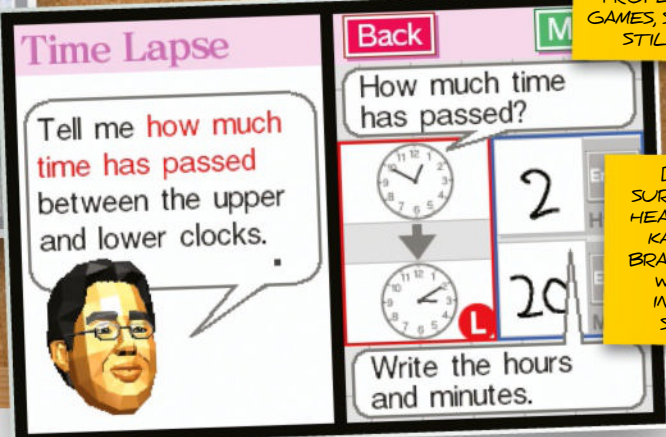
[GAME BOY ADVANCE] I FEEL NO REMORSE OVER CONSTANTLY BEATING MY SISTER AT SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II TURBO. [HAH, I BET - ED]



[DS] I SHOULD REALLY BORROW THE PROFESSOR LAYTON GAMES, SINCE MY SISTER STILL HAS THEM.



[DS] I COULD NEVER GET INTO THE SIMS, BUT THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF THE DS - WIDE APPEAL.



Tell me how much time has passed between the upper and lower clocks.

How much time has passed?



Write the hours and minutes.

[DS] I WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR THAT DR KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING WAS USED IN LIANNA'S SCHOOL.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – [TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG](https://twitter.com/RETROGAMER_MAG)

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!



★ STAR LETTER LETTING IT ALL GO

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I recently decided to sell off my entire videogame collection of old games. I said goodbye to my Atari 2600 treasures, my once precious C64 collection and my extensive PlayStation and Super Nintendo collections. It wasn't an easy decision to make, but the money has proven to be extremely useful as it has not only gone towards an extension on our home, but also a lovely holiday in Spain for the family.

Although I enjoy being surrounded by the things I loved as a child, a lack of space and other commitments mean I simply don't have the time to play games like I used to. Another decision was the fact that it's so easy to play old games now on original hardware (which I have kept) thanks to the likes of ODEs and similar items.

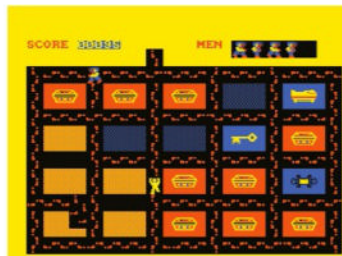
Anyway, I basically wanted to know if this was something that Darran and Nick have ever considered doing as I know they both have quite extensive collections and that Darran has often sold off games at various trading markets. I found the entire experience quite cathartic and would be interested to know if other readers have gone through a similar experience.

David Jenkins

Thanks for sharing your decision with us David, it couldn't have been an easy one to make. Darran's been selling off quite a few games lately to fund a few things outside of gaming, and even Nick has considered selling a few high-end items to go towards his planned trip to Japan. We'd love to hear from readers in a similar position.



» Although he's sold a fair few games recently, Darran's collection is still fairly sizeable



» [Amstrad CPC] *Oh Mummy* was given away with many Amstrad CPCs, so we're not surprised that readers like Andrew have fond memories of it.

AMSTRAD ACTION

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I loved the article on the Amstrad CPC 464 in **RG** 265. It takes me back to when I was nine years old and getting one for Christmas. It paved the way for another 40-plus years of gaming which drives my wife crazy when I ask for another retro machine. My favourite games on the Amstrad were *Hunchback*, *Oh Mummy*, *BMX Simulator* (I bought the Evercade Oliver twins cart just for this) and *Harrier Attack*. Keep up the great work.

Andrew, Wakefield

We're glad you enjoyed the article, Andrew. You like similar games to Darran, who can still remember his mum getting addicted to *Oh Mummy* when he first received his own Amstrad.

RHYTHM IS KING

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Your recent PSP article has me wishing for **Retro Gamer** to cover a genre that has never historically received much coverage on



» [PlayStation 2] You can read about the creation of the original *Guitar Hero* in **RG** 212.

Western shores – rhythm action games. *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* will have an article all to themselves in the future, I'm sure, but I'm talking about the genesis of the genre in 1996 with *Parappa The Rapper*, moving on to other PlayStation jams such as *Bust-A-Groove*, *Vib-Ribbon* and *Gitaroo Man*, to the arcade powerhouses of *Beatmania*, *Pop'n Music* and *Taiko no Tatsujin*, as well as the legendary *EZ2DJ* series and my personal favourite franchise of all time, *DJMax*. Everything mentioned is at least 20 years old now, as much as I hate to admit it, so entirely within your remit.

Enclosed is a photo of my PSP rhythm game collection. The machine was absolute heaven for them.

Cheers,

Daniel Hinchcliffe

That's a lovely collection of PSP games, Daniel. We actually ran *The Bluffer's Guide To Rhythm Action games* all the way back in **RG 225, so you may want to see if you can find a copy online. As for *Guitar Hero*, there was a *Making Of* in **RG** 212, so hopefully you'll be able to grab both.**

RACING BLUES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I was hoping you could help me track down a game I used to play at a friend's house. It was on the Super Nintendo and it was a split-screen racing game with really funky music. It reminded me a lot of those old Amiga *Lotus* games (which I



» [SNES] Darran still has his US copy of *Top Gear*. Publisher Kemco would continue the series on later Nintendo consoles.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer,
Future Publishing, Quay House,
The Ambury, Bath,
Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com



» [Atari Lynx] *Rygar* was a very solid conversion on the Lynx, even with its zoomed-in playing area.

sadly never played) and I have a lot of fond memories of it. One neat trick you could do was crash into the winning post in order to get both first and second place. If you know what it's called I'd love to know.
Yours hopefully,
Simon Jenkins

You're in luck Simon, we know the game you're talking about. We're pretty confident it's one of the *Top Gear* games (there were three released). And if you're wondering why it looked so similar to the *Lotus* games

you mentioned, it's because they were by the same developer. Hope that helps. You can buy them today on contemporary systems (search for *Top Racer*).

TOTALLY BOGUS, DUDE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I love the mag, and frequently find gems to play that would normally have passed me by. Case in point is *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure*, what a cracking game. However... I feel you haven't just let me down, you've let yourselves down. What happened to the Lynx

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Steam Deck

Yes, we're two years behind everyone else, but Darran has just treated himself to a Steam Deck OLED and is now tinkering away with running a bunch of his older PC games, including *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2013*, *Star Wars: Republic Commando* and *Spec Ops: The Line*. If you see an unusual amount of PC coverage in the mag you'll know why.



version of *Rastan* in Conversion Capers? It's a lovely platformer, with decent atmospheric music. The only let down being that the final boss looks like he should be in an Eighties soft metal band! I was there at the beginning of the Lynx's life. Please don't brush it aside.
Si Fox

Worry not Si, for *Rastan* never came out on the Lynx. We're pretty confident you're thinking of *Rygar*, which did get a surprisingly decent conversion. Glad you've been enjoying *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure*, it's far from bogus.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury,
Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Darran 'Tetris DS' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443

Art Editor **Andy 'some Pokémon game' Salter**

Production Editor **Tim 'Zoo Keeper' Empey**

Features Editor **Nick 'Phoenix Wright' Thorpe**

Photographer **Phil 'Nintendogs' Barker**

Group Art Director **Woz 'New Super Mario Bros' Brown**

Editorial Director **Tony 'WarioWare Touched!' Mott**

Contributors

Writing Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Mike Diver, Andrew Fisher, Stuart Hunt, Paul Kautz, Iain Lee, Rory Milne, Lewis Packwood, Paul Rose, James Tocchio

Design Ryan Robbins

Advertising

Media packs are available on request

Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

clare.dove@futurenet.com

Advertising Director **Chris Mitchell**

chris.mitchell@futurenet.com

Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**

kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

International

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

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Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...
What's your favourite DS exclusive?

Brian H

Contra 4. I had to buy an import as it never got a UK release, but it was worth it and I still wish I had it.

Peter Armstrong

Okamiden is one of my favourite games on the DS. It successfully managed to transfer the gameplay and charm of the original *Okami* on PS2. It had a lot of compromises, but they didn't dampen the experience for me.

Imran Yusef

Mario Kart DS. When it came

out, I worked at Sega Europe, and we'd play eight-player races during our break, and if someone used the microwave, it'd disrupt the Wi-Fi and we'd cause such a commotion that we were given a meeting room to scream at each other! [That's an amazing story – Ed]

Michael Conde

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story. This was such a fun game with an incredibly unique premise. It was just so cool to see a game where Bowser has a more primary role than the Mario Bros.

Corbin Lewis

WarioWare: Touched! The series and the DS was a match made in heaven with its touch-screen. This is my favourite *WarioWare* game AND DS game.

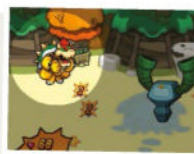
Dr Retro

So many amazing games, but because I've always wanted to be a detective I will have to go with *Professor Layton And The Curious Village*.

Rosagi

All dedicated titles made for the console were special in some way because they

» [DS] *Bowser's Inside Story* left a big impression on readers like Michael Conde.



acknowledged the unique format of the handheld as part and parcel of the experience. I had more playtime on the DS than any other console in my adult years.

Woody2610

Elite Beat Agents is one of those types of games we don't get to see very often. Fresh, innovative, unique and very catchy. I would love a sequel. Before anyone says anything, yes, I am aware that it is a follow-up to *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!*, but they're Japan only.

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Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2009

IT'S COMING RIGHT FOR US

» RETROREVIEWAL



» XBOX 360 » 2008 » FUN LABS
The *Cabela's* series began in the late-Nineties and, like any long-running franchise, went through a number of changes over the years.

Initially debuting on the PC in 1998, games began appearing on consoles from 2001 with the release of *Cabela's Big Game Hunter: Ultimate Challenge* for Sony's PlayStation.

While it has never been a mainstream series in the UK, its popularity stateside meant games were released as recently as 2018 and while most of its titles have never been hailed as critical darlings, their very nature means they've often been discussed in UK gaming magazines over the years.

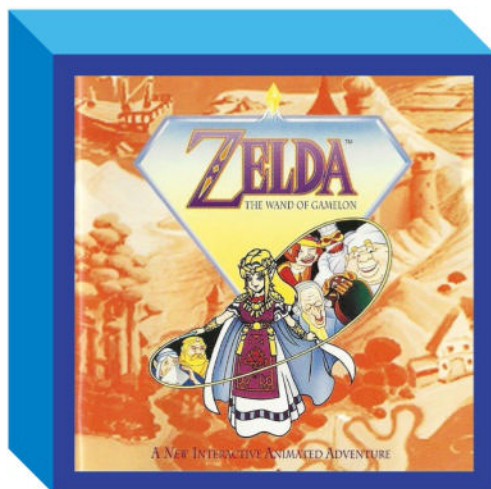
My own experience with the series came when I reviewed *Cabela's African Safari* for one of Imagine's Xbox magazines, and I'm pretty sure I gave it 5/10. I kept an eye on later games, more out of morbid curiosity than anything else and was surprised to see that *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2009* had a story mode that certainly wasn't present when I reviewed *Cabela's African Safari*.

Being one of those people who doesn't consider hunting a sport, the mechanics of the sim side of the game never appealed to me, but there was something ridiculous about the earnestness of 2009's story mode which led to me borrowing a copy from work to see if any semblance of fun could be squeezed from it.

The whole nature of Fun Labs' game felt so divorced from actual hunting that I didn't feel guilty playing it. In fact, I found it quite hilarious in places, particularly when you get to have scripted Hand-To-Claw Combat sequences that see you tussling with bears and other dangerous predators. Where earlier *Cabela's* games were trying to be serious, 2009 felt goofy and tongue-in-cheek. Granted, killing animals is killing animals but here they feel like videogame caricatures, no different from the ducks of *Duck Hunt* or the bears in *Safari Hunt*.

I never completed Fun Labs' game as it was returned a few days later, but its bizarre story, laughable physics and unconvincing weapon dynamics have stayed with me ever since. One day we'll look at *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2013* because that game is absolutely bonkers, but we'll save that one for another time. ★

END GAME



ZELDA: THE WAND OF GAMELON

» Since Hyrule's princess has managed to bag herself a starring role for the first time in ages this year, we thought it was high time to revisit the first time that happened. Yes, we're talking about the CD-i game. It's too late to turn back now, you're on the last page. Let's see how it all ends, then...



» Zelda has Ganon cornered, and she's making one heck of a threat. "Come along nicely now, or I'll ram this pointy thing right where the sun doesn't shine." The villain is appropriately terrified.



» But it was a ruse! Whipping out a giant gold chain, she wraps up the tyrant with ease. It's a good job that she's friends with Mr T, who gave her the chain for protecting his bins from local kids.



» With the magical wand now no longer needed as a threat, Zelda uses it to transport Ganon into an enchanted tome. "Well, that closes the book on that case then," she says to nobody.



» Arriving home at the palace, Zelda decides that her little quip might work better with an audience. "Well, that closes the book on that case then," she repeats. Her dad, having not seen Ganon's defeat, doesn't get it and quickly suggests that everyone should just get very drunk.



» So that's what they do. King what's-his-face and Zelda bust out the wine, and you can see on their faces exactly how much they're enjoying it. Zelda tries her book joke again three more times and spends 45 minutes explaining it, to her dad's ever-diminishing interest.

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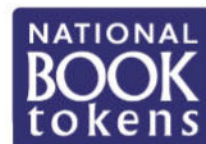


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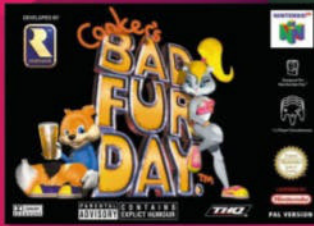
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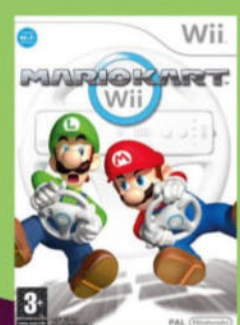
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